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# Toward A Multidimensional Framework: Exploring The Constructed Identities And Pedagogical Styles Of Black Male Kindergarten Teachers In The South

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**TOWARD A MULTIDIMENSIONAL FRAMEWORK: EXPLORING THE CONSTRUCTED  
IDENTITIES AND PEDAGOGICAL STYLES OF BLACK MALE KINDERGARTEN  
TEACHERS IN THE SOUTH**

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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2016

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## **DEDICATION**

To the Most High God, I give you all honor and glory! Thanks for the strength and energy you gave me to keep moving.

To my ancestors, those who came before me and paved the way I take this second dissertation journey as a reminder of your and our constant struggle for educational equity and access. Thanks for being among those who “beg harder for [education] than for food and clothing” (Williams, 2005, p. 141). As a result, ‘we have come from the bottom of humanity and we have climbed every stairway that is capable for the human foot to trot’ (Siddle-Walker, 2003, p. 69).

To my mother, Barbara Bryan, Thank you for your labor of love and your tireless commitment to my educational process. It was from you that I acquire the passion to learn and learn again!

To Melba and Shamir, I dedicate this dissertation to both of you for your ingenuity and insights throughout the dissertation process. Thanks for being listening ears and always supporting my academic urges!

To my one and only nephew, Jerrell, I dedicate this dissertation project to you and hope it serves as a model for the power that lies within you!

To my aunt and uncle, Mary and David Fickens, You have always been there for me throughout many of life adventures. For that I say “thank you”!

To a host of other relatives, I say “thank you”!

Finally, I dedicate this project in memory of Bishop Arthur Doctor and Mrs. Aisha Fickens Washington who have both transitioned from labor to reward. Rest well and see you in the morning!

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Dr. Daniella Cook: You have become more than a fellow colleague and a dissertation committee member. You have become a friend, or better yet, you are “fictive kin” (Cook, 2010). Thanks for embracing me and feeding my intellectual curiosity when my “voice was crying out from the wilderness” (Cook, 2008). I cannot repay you for life lessons I have learned and the experiences I have had in your presence.

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I give a special thanks to the research participants in this study including the three Black male kindergarten teacher and their students and parents. Your work, words, and wisdom will always remain with me.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Given the one-dimensional, essentialist view of Black male teachers as social change agents (i.e., role models and father figures) (Brown, 2012b; Rezai-Rashti, 2008), the purpose of this study was to examine the identities, the ability to support Black male students' success, and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers in the South. Using a multidimensional conceptual framework including Black masculinity, Fictive Kinship Network, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, and Critical Race Theory, this study captured counterstories of culturally relevant Black male kindergarten teachers. The counterstories were used as a methodological tool to convey major themes which demonstrated Black male kindergarten teachers' ability to positively influence Black male kindergarteners academically using culturally relevant teaching.

Findings revealed that Black male kindergarten teachers perceived themselves to be fictive brothers/fathers who fostered collaboration and built solidarity with the Black community to academically and socially support Black male kindergarteners in early childhood classrooms. Black male kindergarten teachers were also found to be pedagogues of culturally relevant classroom management practices. Black male kindergartners reported that their Black male teachers used hip-hop, sports, and mathematics literacies as instructional approaches. Black family members perceived Black male kindergarten teachers as Role Models who represented positive images of Black manhood for their Black male kindergarteners. They also regarded Black male kindergarten teachers as Role Models who minimized Black parents' distrust for White



female teachers and other White educational professionals. The findings of this study may be useful for: (a) understanding the need for the recruitment and retention of culturally relevant Black male teachers to early childhood classrooms; (b) further understanding the need for specific preparation in using hip-hop, sports, and critical literacies as instructional tools in early childhood classrooms; and (c) drawing from the wisdom and wealth of Black family members to inform pedagogical practices in early childhood classrooms.

Key Terms: Black male teachers, culturally relevant pedagogy, critical race theory, early childhood education, fictive kinship network, kindergarten teachers.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

Having conversations with my mother always seems to lend itself to intimate cross-generational exchanges and deeper reflections on my early childhood experiences. On a nice, sunny, Saturday morning in the springtime, while having a bagel and a glass of orange juice on my balcony, I called her to discuss my attempts at writing the introduction to this dissertation project around my experiences in kindergarten. As I began to share with her what I remembered, I began to hear the excitement in her voice. She enjoys talking about the past and sharing family history. That excitement led to her verifying my account of what I recalled and adding details to my already vivid recollection of my fond memories in kindergarten. Throughout the conversation, she constantly said with strong affirmation “You’re right, I can’t believe you remembered all of that.” My reply to her, “Yes Mamma (even at 36 years old I still call her “Mamma”), I remember...” Therefore, my story is a combination of what I remembered, what I was told, and what I researched.

My early years in public school were full of memories of Mr. Carter, my kindergarten teacher. “Mr. C.,” as everyone referred to him, was one of the few male teachers who taught at my predominantly African American elementary school in the urban South. W. J. Frierson Elementary School (pseudonym) was located in the heart of downtown Charleston, South Carolina and was the school where most of the neighborhood children attended. No different than any urban school, our school had its



share of problems including a pervasive history of low performance as a result of the school district's failure to provide adequate resources to meet the needs of its Black student population from poor backgrounds. The school is now defunct like most urban schools that are forced to close due to 'academic underperformance' (Kozol, 2005, 2012).

During my years at W. J. Frierson, most of the district financial allocations were invested in schools on 'the other side of the track' that were predominantly White and middle-class<sup>1</sup>. Such a lack of funding provided an explanation for the outdated, mold-infested, brick school building where ceiling tiles fell quite often due to sustained water and storm damage. As a young child, I vividly remember sitting in my kindergarten classroom counting the number of water stains on ceiling tiles, anxiously awaiting the opportunity to see them fall and the outpour of rainwater that would soon follow. Then, to see Mr. C. conduct the dreadful clean up after which he was always annoyed was quite entertaining at the tender young age of five. He kept buckets and mops in a nearby closet in the classroom because he knew his cleaning ritual would somehow take place again soon. Each time he performed this task, I chanted in my head the song he taught us at the completion of playtime, "Everybody, it's clean up, everybody, it's clean up time."

Among the paucity of male teachers on faculty at our school, Mr. C was the only Black male teacher I could ever remember seeing in the building. There were more Black female teachers than male teachers. In fact, I found my *Lifetouch* yearbook that included photographs of students and teachers. Perusing the photographs, I counted a total of fourteen teachers including seven Black women teachers, six White women teachers, and one Black male. Seemingly in his early 20's, he was also the youngest of them all. From

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<sup>1</sup> I searched school board meeting minutes, NAACP reports, and newspaper articles which documented Black citizens' concerns relative to financial inequities in the district.

what I remembered, he was mature for his age and dressed in such a way that complemented his maturity and youthful age. A bald six feet tall man, who wore paisley bowties, neatly pressed white shirts adorned with sparkling cufflinks, and dark, creased slacks was quite intimidating for a young boy like me who had recently lost his father. His demanding presence, as a result of his height and style of dress, was overwhelming enough to keep the rest of the boys and me on the right track. In fact, we knew not to misbehave in the presence of Mr. C. and if we did, we knew there would be corporal consequences to follow. Mr. C. kept a ruler in his desk that we oftentimes felt in the palm of our hands when we misbehaved. Despite his chastisement, what we knew for sure was that Mr. C. meant “business” in the classroom and he cared about our academic and social wellbeing as young Black students. I did not experience the same level of care and concern from other teachers as I matriculated to upper grade levels. Similar to most present-day public K-12 schools, there was a lack of teachers who believed in the academic and social potential of the Black children they taught (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2005a, b, 2009, 2011; Milner, 2010 b). They did not have high expectations for us, and often did not demonstrate their connection to the Black community.

In his classroom, a very colorful and decorative space full of educational posters, pictorials and other student-centered learning resources, he spoke with such wisdom and confidence that made my classmates and I believed he knew everything. “Brave hearts, I expect nothing but the best, not just today, but tomorrow and forever more” was his daily motto by which he expected us to live. I would never forget it because it became the hallmark of my early childhood experience. In fact, that saying was inscribed on a

bulletin board in his room to which he drew his students' attention every day. I have held on to those words throughout my school years and during the toughest moments in my personal and professional life.

Seemingly all the children in the school admired Mr. C., even children who were not assigned to his class. Such admiration resonated throughout the school because he was visible and actively engaged with all children at all grade levels each day as he played basketball, football, and jumped rope before the start of the school day. In fact, Mr. C was seen as and became the father we never knew, since most of us grew up in single parent homes headed predominantly by young mothers who wanted the best for their children. He took pride in modeling for us how we should "behave," and learn in school, emphasizing the importance of acquiring a good education. His impact on children spread like wildfire throughout the school and its surrounding community. For these reasons, parents wanted their children in Mr. C's class.

Although I remembered vividly Mr. Carter's mentorship, I also remembered he was also an exceptional teacher who taught us requisite academic skills. He taught my classmates and I how to recite the alphabet, count from zero to 100, write our names, recall our birthdays, color within the lines, and so much more. To meet these minimally basic tasks in kindergarten meant that students were well on their way in their academic development. Because I knew most of tasks before I entered school, I almost missed the opportunity to call Mr. C. my kindergarten teacher. I was forced to attend kindergarten half-day; whereas other students were required to attend full-day kindergarten. During that era of kindergarten, students who had the most academic needs were required to attend full-day kindergarten.

All of these memories were catalysts for me wanting to become a teacher. Like Mr. Carter, I, too, became a teacher. I wanted to become a role model for young children with whom I would come in contact. I felt that this would be my way of shaping and giving back to my community. When asked by pre-service teachers who inspired me to become a teacher, I always told stories of the mentorship of Mr. Carter with whom I kept in contact years after high school graduation. I wanted to be just like him. I wanted to wear bowties just like him, execute firm handshakes, and speak in such a commanding voice that would immediately draw my students' attention.

Like Mr. C., Black teachers have, frequently been thought of as Role Models for Black children (Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1996, 2000). Drawing from the scholarly works of DuBois (1903) in which he capitalizes the term "Negro" to honor, track, and remain connected to the exclusion, denigration, suffering, crucifixion, and demonization of Black people and their distinctive historical experiences in America, I purposefully capitalize the terms "Role Models" to honor, track, and remain connected to a group of Black teachers, both men and women, who have historically remained committed to Black children in the face of anti-Black terrorism<sup>2</sup>, enslavement of Black people, Jim Crow segregation, the 'New Jim Crow', and their myriad reinventions existing under different names. I also denote "Role Modeling" as a proper noun demonstrating that the idea has always been grounded in dynamic ways of thinking about Black children and families (Dingus, 2006; Foster, 1997; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003; Siddle-Walker, 1996). Similar to Gloria Ladson-Billings, who troubles the terms "social justice," while

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<sup>2</sup> Butchart (2010) describes terrorism as "the overwhelming force and violence, ranging from simple intimidation through incendiarism, physical violence, shootings and murder against [Black] students and teachers" (p. 33) as enacted by White people.

introducing the terms “Just Justice” in her 2015 American Education Research Association’s (AERA) Social Justice award acceptance lecture, I would also like to trouble the terms role models and role modeling. I want to suggest that what educators should be seeking and fighting for is “Role Models” and “Role Modeling.” Ladson-Billings contends that applying the terms “Just Justice” is not merely a difference in semantics but a fundamental rethinking of our work and tasks as human beings.” I suggest the same as we use the terms “Role Models” and “Role Modeling.” Similarly, Gee (1996) capitalizes the “D” in the word Discourse to distinguish it from lowercase “d” in discourse. Discourse, with a capital “D” is “the recognizable coordination of people, places, objects, tools, technologies, and ways of speaking, listening, writing, reading, feeling, valuing, believing, etc.; whereas, discourse, with lowercase “d” simply stands for language in use. I do the same with the words Role Models and Role Modeling to distinguish it from lower case role models and role modeling.

Henceforth, I use the terms “Role Models” and “Role Modeling” to describe this dynamic experience and understanding throughout this dissertation (Dingus, 2006; Foster, 1997). Black Role Models have always believed in the possibilities and highest potential of Black children (Boutte, 2015; Boutte & Hill, 2006; Boutte & Johnson, 2013; Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1996). Perhaps even to signify the importance of the Role, Black teachers were “othermothers” and “otherfathers”<sup>3</sup> who made students’ dreams become realities in classrooms (Lynn, 2006b). They also developed fictive kinship or relationships similar to those of biological family members with Black children (Cook,

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<sup>3</sup> Drawn from the Black womanist/feminist movement, othermother and otherfather refer to the active role of caring and Role Modeling that Black women and men educators demonstrated in the lives of children in Black communities.

2010). These Role Models typically lived in the same communities in which their students lived (Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009; Siddle-Walker, 1996). Similarly, they attended the same community functions and religious institutions that their students attended (Foster, 1997; Perry et al., 2003; Siddle-Walker, 1996). They typically knew the names of every child and parent, and were what Murrell (2000) considers community teachers or individuals who were actively involved in the educational affairs and politics of Black communities. They also developed positive relationships with their students as they taught them to transgress or to work against the social, economic, and political boundaries imposed upon them (hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Siddle-Walker, 1996). They enacted pedagogies in classrooms that drew from students' diverse lived experiences, and engaged in culturally relevant teaching (Brown, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009) or teaching that centered and drew from the cultural experiences of their students. Concurrently, they produced high achievement outcomes or what Ladson-Billings (2009) refers to as the ability to ensure that Black students develop "literacy, numeracy, technology, social, and political skills in order to be active participants in a democracy" (p. 160). Academic success entails building student motivation and interest long-term. It also entails "student learning"—what it is that students actually know and are able to do as a result of pedagogical interactions with skilled teachers (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 34). In summation, Siddle-Walker (1996) describes Black teachers best. She asserts that these teachers/ Role Models were "people who could bridge their current life with possibilities [students'] lives might hold in the future" (p. 204). All of these characteristics described Mr. C. Like Mr. C., these Black Role Models possessed a strong care and nurturing for Black children. Such care and

nurturing of Black children came out of an Afrocentric history, African excellence, and the history of Black oppression in the forms of both the enslavement of Black people and decades of Jim Crow segregation (Foster, 1997; King, 2005; Siddle-Walker, 2000).

In graduate school where I developed critical consciousness as a result of critical friends<sup>4</sup> in graduate level courses, academic literature, and research that encouraged me to critically read the world around me and the education profession in which I worked (Freire, 1970, 1999). I came to understand the differences between Role Models and role models. The latter conception (lowercase and not capitalized) is grounded in and is in response to deficit thinking of Black children and families. I use the terms role model and role modeling to refer to this deficit view throughout this dissertation. That is to say, the conception of role modeling is grounded in the White hegemonic images, masculinities, and expectations for Black and Brown bodies that are in direct opposition to African-centeredness and Blackness (hooks, 2004). Said more pointedly, I came to understand the idea of serving as role models, mentors, father figures and/or social change agents for Black children in schools and society for most White (and Black) people could translate into the belief that there is something inherently wrong with Black children and families and that they need to be “saved” or rescued from their culture, homes, and communities. Of course, that “something” is embedded in the historical reworking of deficit narratives relative to Black people or those “same old stories” that stereotypically depicted Black fathers as absent and disengaged or the heteronormative description of Black single mothers as overbearing and incapable of positively raising children without the help of a

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<sup>4</sup> Critical friends are those individuals who have embrace critical dispositions that enable them to critique social injustices relative to race, racism, and other forms of oppression (Costello, 2008).

Black man (Brown, 2011; Brown & Donnor, 2011). Using these lenses, Black children, particularly Black boys, are viewed as deficient, helpless, out-of-control, problematic, lazy, and needing guidance to say the least (Ferguson, 2000; Howard, 2014; Howard, Flenbaugh, & Terry, 2012; Howard & Reynold, 2008; Howard & Reynolds, 2013;). Black male teachers are expected to be a part of a monolithic group of Black males who are all essentially the same and have the solutions to correct these so-called *problems* (Brown, 2012; Jackson, Boutte, & Wilson, 2013). They also serve to treat the socio-psychological conditions and needs of Black males in the form of surrogate fathers, without much regard for the systemic and institutional barriers at play (Brockenbrough, 2012b; Brown, 2012). These ideas could possibly explain why there are clarion calls to recruit and retain more Black male teachers to the educational profession (Jackson et al., 2013).

Unfortunately, some Black male teachers do not know they are considered to be role models instead of Role models for Black children. For them, role modeling can become burdensome and has caused them to work *for* Black children and families instead of *with* them. Hence, they operate primarily from deficit perspectives into which they are socialized as a result of deficit gazes. And, while these gazes have the potential to become burdens for Black male teachers, they provide comfort for White teachers who struggled to positively interact with Black children because they misunderstood them (Howard, 2014; Kunjufu, 2012; Landsman & Lewis, 2011). As expatiated below, I experienced this in my personal teaching experiences.

Although I wanted to be a Role Model for all children, for my White teacher colleagues, I became a role model for Black children. I became the teacher to whom they



sent the Black males (and girls) who they considered belligerent, disrespectful, uncontrollable, and mouthy, never considering the role they, as teachers, played in creating such behaviors among their students. “Mr. Bryan, can you speak with him or her about his or her behavior in my class?” was a question I heard frequently. Therefore, to have someone on faculty who, in my White colleagues’ eyes, knew how to “discipline” and “control” Black children served to protect their White privilege, entitlement, comfort levels, and concerns. I found myself having to provide guidance to their students because they professed to not know how. Instead of pointing out my White colleagues’ deficiencies and inability to work with Black children, I inadvertently become the ‘problem solver’ for them. Consequently, I became tired and frustrated operating in such a way.

When I was not able and/or refuse to engage as a role model, I was not seen as the “right kind of man” for the education profession (Anderson & Kharem, 2009; Carrington & McPhee, 2008; Pabon, 2013). These double-messages about Black males (Jackson et al., 2013) of being both the problem and the solution confused me the most. Consequently, my failure to “discipline” and “control” Black children in the way they (White teachers and administrators) desired, often produced discomfort for them and generated racist actions towards me such as the blatant use of the word “nigger” employed by a White female teacher colleague.

One day, I was on cafeteria duty at Brunson Academy for Advanced Studies (pseudonym) - a predominantly White magnet school. A group of students, both Black and White, were enjoying each other’s presence before the start of another school day. It was a beautiful morning, the sun was shining, and the smell of a hot Southern breakfast

consisting of grits, bacon, eggs, and biscuits emanated the cafeteria area where children congregated to have breakfast before the bell rang to start classes. I stood in the cafeteria's doorway monitoring to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the children, which were the expectations for teachers and administrators who were "on duty." This did not preclude me from enjoying breakfast myself. During my assigned duty, it was customary practice for me to allow the children to intermingle as they moved from table to table to interact with their friends. I allowed them to engage as such because this was the only time they were able to enjoy an unstructured moment, as the school schedule was inundated with structured academic responsibilities with minimal time integrated for play. It was an intense academic environment, considering the children were identified as "gifted and talented" and were expected to maintain an above average grade point average to remain at the school. Amid their childhood exchanges, the noise level rose significantly among them, particularly among a group of Black children (the few who attended the school). I was comfortable with the noise level; however, one of my White female colleagues was not so happy about it at all. She was about 5'6 with long blond hair and pale White skin. She rudely approached me to discuss her concerns. With one hand placed on her hips and the other pointing directly towards the group of Black children in the corner, she exclaimed, "Dr. Bryan, don't you think the children are too loud? I have asked the group in the corner to settle down several times but they refused to listen to me. I think you need to say something to them!" I replied, "Mrs. Foxx, I think they are just fine. I think they are all just enjoying a little time together." Apparently frustrated at the decision I made to not discipline the children, she uttered in a low voice, "I am tired of these niggers! I need you to do your job!" On one hand, this example

points to arguments made by Ladson-Billings (2011) that Black children, particularly Black boys, are not seen as children who are simply being children. At the time of this writing, recent tragedies including the death of Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, Tamir Rice, and others by the hands of White police officers reify Ladson-Billings' assertions. On the other hand, in Mrs. Foxx's mind, although I was a man, I became a boy needing guidance and to be told what to do. I agree with Lynn (2006b) who suggests that "while Black men are mythologically constructed as the epitome of hyper-masculinity and macho prowess, they are *not* men in the eyes of White America" (p. 238). I immediately reported her to the principal (a White middle-age woman) who ignored what had taken place. I was frustrated and the anger I felt was debilitating. All I could ever think about was, despite how I reached professional parity with her (and indeed had a Ed.D. and she did not), I was still just "a nigger"! I agree with Malcolm X who professed that regardless of the professional and educational status of a Black man, he will always be a "nigger." I do not apologize for the use of the word "nigger" in this dissertation. I have used it several times to speak against ways White people used the term to denigrate Black people. I tend to use the word "nigger" often; however, not with the same malicious intent many slave masters and White people use it presently to degrade Black people (X & Haley, 1965). Like me, Black people have always re-invented White terrorism or negative attacks for Black uplift (Anderson, 1988; Butchart, 2010; Perry et al., 2003).

As I revisited that moment, I realized that Black male teachers, who do not give into role modeling, are "niggered" (Harper, 2009) and viewed as "not doing their job." Unfortunately, I also realize that Black male teachers, who play into the idea of role modeling, become wardens who keep Black children, particularly Black males, in line for

White teachers who may not understand their cultural differences. Now I begin to wonder whether the national push to recruit and retain Black male teachers serves to benefit Black children or to protect White women who dominate the field of education from them.

With such considerations in mind, I wondered what it would be like if young Black male students in kindergarten classrooms could experience teachers like Mr. C. who was the quintessential Role Model for his Black students. This is not to suggest that there are no Role Models presently in schools for Black children. I am sure there are Black male teachers who demonstrate daily the pedagogic identities, beliefs and performance styles that suggest they believe in the possibility and potential of young Black males (Brown, 2009; Lynn, 2006b). However, taking on the task of Role Model is difficult in school environments where Black male teachers are expected to be role models at all educational levels. Even though Black males may serve as Role Models, others still view them as role models (Jackson et al., 2013).

Drawing from Foucault's (1990) conception of power in the *History of Sexuality*, I do not negate ways Black women teachers are also expected to be role models and 'save' Black children. However, the ways Black women teachers are expected to serve as role models and 'save' Black children may be slightly different than ways Black male teacher are expected to do the same. In other words, Black women teachers are expected to be nurturers and caregivers; whereas Black male teachers are expected to execute tough love towards Black children, particularly Black male student (Brockenbrough, 2012c; Brown, 2009; Lynn, 2006a, b). Although Black women teachers also endure racialized experiences in the public K-12 schools, they also do so in different ways than

do Black men teachers (Foucault, 1990; Jay, 2009). In most cases, from the enslavement of African people to present times in American history, the Black male body seems to be far more threatening than the Black female body (Williams, 2005). Specifically, we have seen such threats in early childhood classrooms where Black men kindergarten teachers, like most Black male teachers, are viewed as suspicious, questionable, and dangerous (Bryan & Browder, 2013; Lynn, 2006b). Black women teachers are included among those teachers who have “laps of love” or the flat area between the waist and knees on which young children are able to sit safely and comfortably in early childhood classrooms (Sargent, 2004).

Given the aforementioned discursive background, this study poses the following questions:

- How do Black male kindergarten teachers perceive and respond to predetermined positioning of Black male teachers as social change agents i.e., role models and/or father figures?
- What are the constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers who influence the academic achievement outcomes among Black male kindergarten students?
- How do Black male students perceive the identities, the ability to support their success, and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers?
- How do Black family members perceive Black male kindergarten teachers’ identities, ability to support students’ success, and pedagogical styles?

## **Statement and Discussion of the Problem**

I commenced this dissertation study with a story based on my early childhood experiences under the tutelage of a Black male kindergarten teacher and subsequently my own professional experiences as a former elementary and high school teacher for several reasons which point to the problem addressed by the present study. First, Black male teachers are frequently constructed as social change agents or role models for Black children, particularly Black male students. Second, research studies that focus on Black male teachers rarely employ multidimensional frameworks to examine their identities and pedagogical styles. Third, there is an absence of focus on Black male teachers in early childhood education research. Fourth, Black male kindergarten teachers are absent from scholarly research on Black male teachers who use culturally relevant pedagogies. Fifth, despite the significance of the South in Black education research (Morris & Monroe, 2009), there is a limited body of research on culturally relevant Black male teachers in the South. Fifth, the voices of Black male students are rarely heard regarding the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers. Finally, the voices of Black family members on Black teachers have been largely ignored in extant educational research.

### **Historical Construction of Black Male Teachers as Social Change Agents**

A large body of historical research literature has constructed Black male teachers as social change agents (i.e., role models, father figures, coaches, and disciplinarians)—an idea that has been built around their recruitment and retention to the field of education (Brown, 2012; Brown & Butty, 1999; Bryan & Ford, 2014; Chmelynski, 2006; Lewis, 2006; Lynn, 2002, 2006; Lynn et al., 1999). A similar idea has been found in media and

popular press (Brockenbrough, 2012a,b). This notion provides a rationale for Education Secretary Arne Duncan's commitment to an intensive national campaign with the goal of recruiting and retaining more Black male teachers to public school classrooms (Brown, 2012). Duncan's "5 by 2015" initiative purported to increase the low percentage of Black male teachers from a mere 1 percent to 5 percent by 2015 (Brown, 2012). Rezai-Rashti and Martino (2010) assert that recruitment calls as such are formed through what Cornel West (1999) refers to as 'homogenizing impulse,' which contends that Black people are a monolithic group. Brown (2012) notes that little efforts have been made in policy and educational discourses to work against the idea of positioning the Black male teacher as the ideal role model for Black male students. Although many scholars have contested such images on the grounds that Black male teachers have been too often defined and described as a monolithic group (Brown, 2009, 2012; Lynn et al., 1999; Lynn, 2006a, b; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010), few scholars have examined how Black male kindergarten teachers respond to the traditional positioning of Black male teachers as social change agents (Brown, 2012). This examination is important because few Black men teach at the kindergarten level. Often, those Black men who do are positioned as being less than masculine, suspicious, and/or homosexual (Lynn, 2006a, b). Considering the number of women in early childhood education, the qualities assigned to kindergarten teachers are essentially considered feminine; therefore men, across any racial and ethnic group, may be considered the same (Carrington & McPhee, 2008; Haase, 2008; 2010; Lynn, 2006a, b; Sargent, 2004). Thus, it becomes important to determine how Black male kindergarten teachers respond to the traditional positioning of Black male teachers in light of the historical, essentialist construction and suspicion of them at the kindergarten

level. Brown further (2012) “counters discourse to the typical theorization of the Black male teacher” (p. 307) during which he solely focuses on middle school teachers. Brown (2012) further adds that what has been largely missing from previous research on Black teachers, specifically Black male teachers theorizing is how they “make sense of the contradictory ways they are positioned in schools” (p. 299). Brown and Donnor (2011) uses the varying pedagogical performance styles of Black male teachers to counter stereotypical discourses of Black male as social change agents; however, educational research has under-explored Black male teachers’ understanding and perception of their roles as social change agents. More pointedly, Black male teachers have rarely had opportunities to describe how they perceive themselves as social change agents. Thus, as Brockenbrough (2012b) contends, educators do not know whether prospective or current Black male teachers desire to serve as social change agents. Considering the historical pervasiveness of such *role entrapment* (Kelly, 2007; Madsen & Mabokela, 2000) of the Black male teacher and the scholarly attention given to the diverse ways Black male teachers enact their pedagogies (Brown & Butty, 1999; Lewis, 2006; Lewis & Toldson, 2013), scholars have undertheorized the diverse ways Black male teachers perceive this construction and need to fully explore it before examining the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers and how they impact the achievement of Black male students.



## **A Limited Body of Research Exploring Black Male Teachers Through Multidimensional Frameworks**

While scholars (Brockenbrough, 2012a, b, c; Brown & Donnor, 2011; Lynn, 2006a, b) have come to fully understand the diversity that exists among Black male teachers, few scholars who explore Black male teachers have used multidimensional frameworks to problematize the often one-dimensional view of them in extant educational research (Brockenbrough, 2012a). Brockenbrough (2008) argues that in order to better understand said diversity among Black male teachers and to overhaul essentialist points of view regarding them, it is essential to engage in research studies that draw from multidimensional theoretical points of view. Such integration of multidimensional theoretical frameworks is important in light of the increasing number of diverse Black male teachers who enter public school classrooms (Brockenbrough, 2008). Thus, this study uses a multidimensional framework to explore the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers.

## **The Absence of Black Male Teachers in Early Childhood Research**

Considering the overwhelming presence of (White) female teachers in early childhood classrooms and what Carrington and McPhee (2008) refers to as “the quintessentially feminine domain” (p. 287) of early childhood teaching or early years teaching portrayed as women’s work (Baum et al., 2014), mainstream research studies in early childhood education have rarely focused on men (Friedman, 2010; Haase, 2010; Jones, 2008; Murray, 1996; Rentzou & Ziganitidou, 2009; Skelton, 1991, 1994; Sumison, 1999, 2000; Warin, 2006). While few scholars focus on men, they have underexplored Black men as teachers in early childhood classrooms (Bryan & Browder, 2013).

Therefore, Black male teachers are virtually non-existent in early childhood education research (Bryan & Browder, 2013). Many early childhood education researchers have elevated the identities, and pedagogical styles of White American males and international, Eurocentric male teachers while excluding these conceptions relating to Black male teachers in early childhood education (Bryan & Browder, 2013). This historic erasure of the identities and pedagogical performance styles of Black men teachers in early childhood education is problematic and needs further exploration (Bryan & Browder, 2013; Lynn, 2006 a, b). Hence, the present study will highlight the identities and performance styles of Black male kindergarten teachers.

### **The Absence of Black Male Kindergarten Teachers as Culturally Relevant Pedagogues**

Although many scholars have explored the culturally relevant identities and pedagogical performance styles of Black male teachers (Brown, 2009, 2012; Lynn, 2006a, b; Lynn et al., 1999), what has been largely and glaringly missing from such exploration is how these identities and pedagogical styles influence the achievement academic outcomes of Black male students. Lynn, Johnson, and Hassan (1999) and Lynn (2006) explored the culturally relevant identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers. While Lynn (2006b) and Lynn et al. (1999) focused heavily on the pedagogical practices of Black male teachers, little attention has been given to how these practices impact the academic outcomes of Black male students. Brown (2009) documented the culturally relevant identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers, while also arguing that we need to know how these identities and styles impact the academic outcomes of Black males. However, there is not sufficient research that documents *how*

these identities and styles influence the academic achievement outcomes of Black male students. Precisely, research studies have underexplored how culturally relevant Black male kindergarten and other Black male teachers influence achievement outcomes of Black male students despite Ladson-Billings' (2009) call for culturally relevant teachers to produce academic success among Black students. According to Ladson-Billings (2009), academic success is an important dimension of culturally relevant pedagogy. Furthermore, considering the age of neoliberalism, Aronson and Laughter (2015) and Sleeter (2012) argue that educational scholars and researchers should engage in robust evidence-based research that connects academic outcomes to culturally relevant practices as a way to push back against neoliberal reforms that have called for the standardization of instructional practices and curricula in public education classrooms.

Most Black male teachers teach at the middle and high school levels (Toldson, 2011); therefore, much of the research literature on culturally relevant Black male teachers has focused exclusively on this population (Brockenbrough, 2012 a,b; Brown, 2009; Brown & Donnor, 2011; Lynn, 2006a, b; Martino & Rashti-Rezai, 2010). Less than 1 percent of Black males teach at middle and high school levels (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Therefore, there is not a broad understanding of and/or a knowledge base on Black male teachers' culturally relevant identities, and pedagogical styles at the early childhood level. More pointedly, Black male kindergarten teachers have been marginalized in extant educational research literature on culturally relevant Black male teachers (Bryan & Browder, 2013). This marginalization entails Black male teachers rarely being included in the research on culturally relevant pedagogy and other critical scholarship in Black education.

## **The Limited Research on Culturally Relevant Black Male Teachers in the South**

The South plays and has played an important role in the struggle for Black education (Anderson, 1988; Butchart, 2010; Morris and Monroe, 2009; Williams, 2005). Historically and contemporarily, Black male teachers play and have played major roles in working against Jim Crow segregation and present-day racial inequities in the schooling experiences of Black (male) students including the disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates among them (Smith & Harper, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2014; Williams, 2005). Presently, the South still contributes to the racialized experiences of Black male teachers in public K-12 settings (Bryan & Browder, 2013). Further, Brown (2012) and Kelly (2012) contend that Black male teachers need to theorize their lives and work in present-day schools in the South, considering that previous scholarship on Black teachers and Black education positioned Black female teachers as the “important piece of the puzzle to understand all that was, indeed, good and functioning in segregated schools in the South” (Kelly, 2012, p. 217). While a growing body of scholarship has explored culturally relevant Black male teachers in the Mid-western United States (Brown, 2009, 2011, 2012; Lynn, 2006a, b; Lynn et al., 1999), little of this work has explored Black male teachers in the South (Foster, 1997; Hayes, Juarez, & Escoffery-Runnels, 2014; Johnson, 2014; Williams, 2005) and how their identities, ability to support Black male students’ academic success, and pedagogical styles influence achievement outcomes among Black male students. While studying the nexus of race and place to investigate Black student achievement in the South is essential to rethinking Black student achievement (Morris & Monroe, 2009), studying Black male teachers in the context of

race and place is equally important regarding Black male teachers and how they influence Black (male) student achievement.

### **The Limited Research Regarding Black Male Students' Voices on Black Male Teachers**

Ball and Tyson (2011) argued that “absent from the content of much of the research on teaching and teacher education are the voices and perspectives of marginalized student populations” (p. 401). Likewise, Greene (2000) contended that “young learners have to be noticed, it is now being realized; they have to be consulted” (p. 11). With more than two decades of conceptual and empirical research on culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally relevant teachers, and culturally relevant Black male teachers (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings 1994, 2009; Lynn, 2006a, b; Milner, 2010b), studies have not given much attention to the voices of Black students as they describe the culturally relevant identities and pedagogical practices of Black male teachers. This notion is specifically true for Black male kindergarten students, like most children, who are often viewed as incapable of making informed decisions (Cannella, 1997; Rogoff, 2003). While some studies have explored Black male teachers' perspectives on Black (male) students (Foster, 1997; Hopkins, 1997), Black male students' perspectives about their Black male teachers are rarely addressed. Considering the influx of research that has described how teachers' identities and pedagogical practices have influenced, negatively or positively, Black males' schooling experiences in upper elementary, middle and high schools (Anderson, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Howard, 2014), the voices of Black male kindergartners as they describe how the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers support them in early childhood classrooms need to be heard and would provide

valuable insight. Yet, despite the growing body of research literature that explores the voices of Black male students (Anderson, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Harper & Davis, 2012; Howard, 2014), educators rarely have accounts from Black male students in early childhood education in general. This is particularly true for Black male kindergartners. Such narrow focus on the voices of Black male students in early childhood education in general and kindergartners specifically continues a historical legacy of delegitimizing the voices, early needs and care for young Black children in early childhood education (Rashid, 2009). Furthermore, kindergarten is an important component of K-12 education because it is the foundation for subsequent education. It is the key land mark where children, from all racial and ethnic backgrounds, can develop essential academic skills to not only further their education, but also to improve their life chances and to become a part of a democratic society (Rashid, 2009).

### **The Limited Research on Black Family Members' Voices on Black Male Teachers**

In light of the under-examination of the voices of Black males and other students regarding the identities and pedagogical practices of Black males and other teachers, the voices of Black family members have also been understudied in extant educational research (Reynold, 2008). Because teachers and other school officials have negative perceptions regarding Black family members and their family involvement practices (Boutte & Johnson, 2014; Howard & Reynolds, 2008;), educators and educational researchers need to know the perceptions Black family members have regarding the identities and pedagogical performance styles of Black male kindergarten teachers. Similarly, with the changing and diverse dynamics of many families, particularly in the Black community, research studies are silent on other caregivers of Black boys and their

perceptions of the identities and pedagogical styles of Black teachers, in this case Black male kindergarten teachers.

### **The Limited Use of Creative Approaches in Counterstorytelling**

Methodologically, while many scholars (Johnson, 2014; Lynn & Jennings, 2009) who explore Black male teachers have employed critical race methodology in the form of counterstorytelling, few scholars (Bell, 1988) have employed creative, literary ways/approaches to write data and to engage in counterstorytelling or stories that counter dominant narratives about people of color to make them more accessible to marginalized communities, particularly creative forms that resonant with people of African ancestry. During her 2012 tenure as President of the American Education Research Association (AERA), Arnetha Ball stressed the importance of “[advancing] knowledge about education, and [promoting] the use of research to improve education and serve the public” (AERA, 2012). I also agree with Cook (2013) who suggested that the use of creative, literary ways/approaches serves to “[make] research accessible beyond academic audiences” (p. 182). This idea does not suggest that all counterstories are accessible and/or accessible to broader and diverse communities (Cook, 2008; Cook & Dixon, 2013). With such consideration in mind, Bell (1992) used counter-storytelling in the form of parables to share his experiences as a Black male law professor and educator to challenge issues of race and racism at his university and in the United States. Johnson (2014) used composite counterstorytelling in the form of performative writing through dramaturgical plays to highlight his pedagogical practices as a culturally relevant/critical race pedagogue in an urban high school in the South. Therefore, educators and educational researchers need more studies on Black male teachers that apply creative and

accessible methodological approaches to continue to make attempts at making research more accessible, improving education, and serving the public good.

### **Research Purpose and Questions**

Given the aforementioned statement and discussion of the problem in educational research, the purpose of this study is to examine the identities, the ability to support Black male kindergarteners' success, and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers who influence the academic achievement outcomes of young Black male students. This study captures performative counterstories of culturally relevant Black male kindergarten teachers, which demonstrate their ability to positively impact young Black males academically and engage in culturally relevant teaching. This idea is important considering "[the] call for more Black male teachers is often part of policy discussions addressing the underachievement of Black male students, which generally assumes that the Black male teacher has certain dispositions and experiences to reach the troubled Black male student" (Brown, 2012, p. 297). Moreover, if Black male teachers are to better serve Black male students in classrooms, counterstories are essential to demonstrate how they can influence academic achievement outcomes among them. Further, counterstories from Black male teachers can also shed light on the relationship between their identities and pedagogical styles that are needed to support Black males in classrooms (Brown, 2009).

To contribute to a growing body of work that addresses and explores culturally relevant Black male teachers, the following research questions are advanced for this study:



1. How do Black male kindergarten teachers perceive and respond to predetermined positioning of Black male teachers as social change agents (i.e., role models and/or father figures)?
2. What are the constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers who influence the academic achievement outcomes among Black male kindergarten students?
3. How do Black male students perceive the identities, the ability to support their success, and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers?
4. How do Black family members perceive Black male kindergarten teachers' identities, ability to support students' success, and pedagogical styles?

### **Significance of the Study**

There is an overrepresentation of predominantly White, middle-class, monolingual females in the field of education (Price-Dennis & Souto-Manning, 2011; Sealey-Ruiz, Lewis, & Toldson, 2014). Recent statistics suggest that 75% of today's teachers are White females and 10% are White males, while 6 % are Black females (Irvine & Fenwick, 2011; Toldson, 2011; Toldson & Lewis, 2012). This is particularly more pronounced at the kindergarten level where more than 85 % of teachers are White females (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014; Toldson, 2011); thus resulting in a vast short supply of Black male teachers in the field of education. A mere 1 % of K-12 teachers are Black males (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014; Bryan & Ford, 2014; Bryan & Browder, 2013; Lewis & Toldson, 2014). When grade levels are added, the number of Black male teachers decline even more drastically. For example, less than 1 % of Black male teachers work in elementary schools (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014; Lewis & Toldson, 2014).

Thus, because my study prioritizes the pedagogical practices and identities of Black male teachers who are often excluded from teacher education and Black education research (Lynn et al., 2009), it can provide insight and solutions to the field of education, particularly regarding the benefits and importance of Black male teachers to public school classrooms. While many scholars call for an increase in the number of Black male teachers to K-12 classrooms (Brown, 2012; Jones & Jenkins, 2012; Lewis & Toldson, 2013), this study can also serve as a blueprint to alleviate the shortage of Black male teachers by providing solutions to the recruitment and retention of Black male teachers at the early childhood level.

A litany of studies on Black male students documents and have documented how public K-12 schools fail to meet their academic and social needs (Anderson, 2015; Brown & Donnor, 2012; Dancy, 2014; Hopkins, 1997; Howard, 2014; Howard et al., 2012; Howard & Reynolds, 2013; Kunjufu, 2007, 2010, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Noguera, 2001; Palmer & Maramba, 2011; Polite & Davis, 1999). Black male students perform the lowest on all national and state-level assessments (Dancy, 2014; Ford, 2013; Toldson, 2011). They are often enrolled in special education classes instead of gifted education ones (Dancy, 2014; Ford, 2013; Kunjufu, 2005; Toldson, 2011). They are often disproportionately suspended and expelled from schools in comparison to their White male counterparts (Howard, 2014). Such disproportionality in school discipline starts as early as pre-school (U.S. Department of Education, 2014; Powell, 2014). Therefore, this study provides insight into ways Black Male Role Models can assist in addressing these and other issues and assist in serving as advocates for Black male students in public school classrooms.

With more than two decades of research on culturally relevant teaching, few studies document the impact culturally relevant pedagogical practices have on student academic achievement outcomes (Aronson & Laughter, 2015). Aronson and Laughter (2015) and Sleeter (2012) argue that in the age of neoliberal education or education that upholds free-markets and the privatization of public K-12 education, culturally relevant pedagogy and other culturally responsive frameworks are being undermined in public schools and classrooms. Given such a case, Sleeter (2012) recommends that educational scholars and researchers engage in research studies that demonstrate the impact culturally relevant pedagogy has on student academic outcomes as a way to push back against neoliberal education. Thus, the line of inquiry is significant because it connects culturally relevant pedagogy to student academic outcomes.

Because most White teachers including those who work in kindergarten classrooms are often culturally insensitive and pose a threat to the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogies essential to the academic and social outcomes of Black male students in classrooms (Irving & Fenwick, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009; Leonardo & Boas, 2013; Milner, 2010b), this line of inquiry continues to build on scholarship that determines how the diversity of Black male teachers' cultural experiences and philosophies inform their pedagogies as they work with Black male students in kindergarten classrooms (Brown, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009; Lynn, 2006).

Over many decades, educational scholars on Black teacher education prioritized educational access, equality, and opportunities for Black children, and focus on Black teachers theorizing their work and practice with Black students (Ball, 2000; Dixson,

2003; Foster, 1997; Kelly, 2012; Lynn, 2002, 2006). I build on Black teacher education scholarship as I explore Black male teachers working towards access, equality, and opportunities for Black children while also theorizing their practices in classrooms (Lynn 2002, 2006). Specifically, like most studies on Black male teachers, my study builds on qualitative research on Black teachers on teaching (Baszile, 2006, 2009; Berry, 2010; Cook, 2008, 2013; Dingus, 2006; Dixson, 2003; Foster, 1997; Jeffries, 1997; Kelly, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009; Siddle-Walker, 1996; White, 1970; Williams, 2005). This line of inquiry is important, because historically, research on Black teachers have been excluded from and/or marginalized within teacher education research (Foster, 1997; Kelly, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2005a, b; Lynn & Jennings, 2009). The master narrative suggests that Black teachers and their pedagogic beliefs, styles and contributions do not matter in educational research (Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009). Further, according to Lynn (2002), the field of teaching is constructed “as a set of discrete variables or funds of knowledge to be mastered. Teaching is viewed as an objective act that is nonpolitical in nature. Issues of identity and social responsibility do not become a part of the analysis” (p. 121). Thus, this idea produces a system where Black teachers become and are rendered invisible (Foster, 1997; Lynn, 2002). Therefore, to value and appreciate the historical contributions of and scholarship on Black teachers, I carry on the tradition of building a growing body of literature on Black educators that make them visible.

This study is also significant to critical race theoretical literature and critical race scholars who use critical race theory to examine teacher education. It builds on such needed scholarship in teacher education (Cook, 2015). This study focuses on race and

racial issues in teacher education, specifically in-service teacher education. Cook (2015) contends that applying CRT to teacher education is essential because it has been under-theorized and under-utilized therein. Therefore, it becomes essential to theorize the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers along points of the teaching continuum.

Considering the one-dimensional construction of Black male teachers as role models, my study builds on scholarship that calls for a paradigm shift in the way we view and construct Black male teachers in relation to Black boys (Brown, 2009; 2012; Lynn, 2006; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010). Brown (2012) suggests that Black male teachers are ‘pedagogical kinds’ or individuals whose expectations are predetermined before they enter classrooms. While Black men teachers have historically served as social change agents for Black children (Foster, 1997), they also possess pedagogical styles that positively influence the academic outcomes of Black boys (and girls) (Brown, 2012; Lewis, 2006).

In light of the theoretical obsession with the cold sterility of negative school statistics on Black male students in educational research (Howard, 2014; Howard & Reynolds, 2013), my research explores ways Black male kindergarten teachers work against such obsession by supporting the academic success of Black male students, and enacting identities and pedagogical styles that influence academic achievement outcomes among them. Howard (2014) and Howard and Reynolds (2013) document the structural and institutional challenges and perils facing Black males in K-12 education; however, they provide recommendations regarding ways individuals who have vested interest in the academic and social plight of Black males can play a role in creating a paradigm shift

for Black males in society writ large and schools. Building on the recommendations of several scholars (Brown & Butty, 1999; Bryan & Ford, 2014; Hopkins, 1997; Howard, 2014; Howard & Reynolds, 2013) who suggest ways to support Black males in schools across the educational continuum, my study provides insight regarding ways Black male teachers can support the academic plight of Black males in schools.

Because the voices of Black male kindergarten teachers have been underexplored and their identities undertheorized in both mainstream and critical research on Black male teachers, including these voices and identities helps to broaden our understanding of who counts as teachers in the eyes of teachers, children, and parents. Having more Black male teachers in early childhood may possibly help dismantle some of the hegemonic forces that limit occupational choices for women and men in society (Bryan & Browder, 2013; Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011), and may also significantly impact society's perceptions of gender-specific occupations. Moreover, to better understand Black male teachers theorizing their work in kindergarten classrooms, I agree with Kelly (2012) who suggests that "we must not only focus on what they do, but also what they say" (p. 218).

This line of inquiry also builds on contemporary scholarship (Howard, 2014; Reynolds, 2010) that explores the voices of Black family members regarding their experiences with teachers and other school officials in K-12 schools. The inclusion of Black family members' voices is important to the extant literature on family involvement that often stereotypically describe them in urban and rural schools as uninvolved in schools and the educational lives of their children (Boutte & Johnson, 2014; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Johnson, 2015). This present research study counters traditional positivistic, Eurocentric modes of family involvement and what it looks like in public

schools and calls for a more critical and culturally responsive way of involving Black family members in the educational process of their children (Boutte & Johnson, 2014; Howard & Reynolds, 2008). In others, the study moves beyond one-dimensional approaches relative to family involvement and embraces a more bi-directional one (Boutte & Johnson, 2014). Moreover, this line of inquiry also builds on educational scholarship on family involvement in a sense that it explores other caregivers (i.e., adopted parents) of Black boys, thus moving beyond the silence that renders this population invisible in extant educational research. This addition to educational scholarship is vitally important because the research literature is scant in this area of family involvement particularly relative to Black children.

### **Rationale for the Selection of Kindergarten**

Nationally, Black children constitute more than 33 % of the kindergarten population, which is an enrollment trend that suggests that they are among the majority of those who are enrolled in kindergarten (Milner, 2015). Such high enrollment trends support Milner's (2015) convictions suggesting that Black children, other children of color, and children from impoverished backgrounds are more school dependent than their White middle-class counterparts. Thus, for Black males, like most children of color, their lives depend on what happens in kindergarten classrooms (Rashid, 2009). However, while such is the case, Black males remain subsumed within the extant early childhood literature (Rashid, 2009). In other words, few educational studies focus on Black males unless they emphasize pathological ideas about them. Before they start kindergarten, Black boys are seen as 'problems' or what Upchurch (1996) describes as being 'convicted in the womb.' To sum this up best, Boutte (2015) contends that few teachers,

administrators, and other school officials see the possibilities of the Black children including Black males. Because I believe in the possibilities of Black children, particularly Black male children, I highlight what they can do in kindergarten classrooms and focus on the identities and the pedagogical styles of their Black male teachers who support and facilitate what they can do. These ideas purport to help educational scholars and stakeholders alike not only acknowledge, but also move beyond the ‘troubling’ school experiences of Black male students in K-12 schools to better support them. This study represents an early start in support of what Howard (2014) contends as a paradigm shift regarding the way Black boys are viewed in schools.

### **Key Terms and Definitions**

**Black Males:** This term describes and/or refers to native-born Black-American/ African-American men (Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2015). I mostly use the term Black instead of African-American, like West and Buschendorf (2014), “to keep track of the historical specificity of a priceless and precious people who have been terrorized, traumatized, and stigmatized by the American nation state, economy, and a large number of American citizens” (p. 12).

**Black Masculinity Theory:** A theoretical idea suggesting that Black men’s masculine identities are largely informed by White supremacist patriarchy (hooks, 2004).

**Critical Race Theory (CRT):** Born out of the Critical Legal Studies movement, Critical race theory in education is a field of study that prioritizes race and racism and how they have negatively impacted/informed the schooling experiences and outcomes of children of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT also highlights and problematizes the



racialized teaching experiences of teachers of color and school administrators in the field of education (Jay, 2009).

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP):** Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) connects the cultural experiences of children of color to teaching and learning to ensure academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical awareness (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009). CRP is antithetical to traditional modes of teaching that prioritizes White, middle-class culture in schools, schooling, and school curriculum.

**Fictive Kinship Network:** Social and economic relationships maintained by Black people who are not blood kin (Cook, 2010; Cook & Williams, 2015; Fordham, 1996).

**Identity:** “Identity is the way teachers are positioned to see, experience, understand, and represent their realities to others” (Milner, 2010a, p. 5).

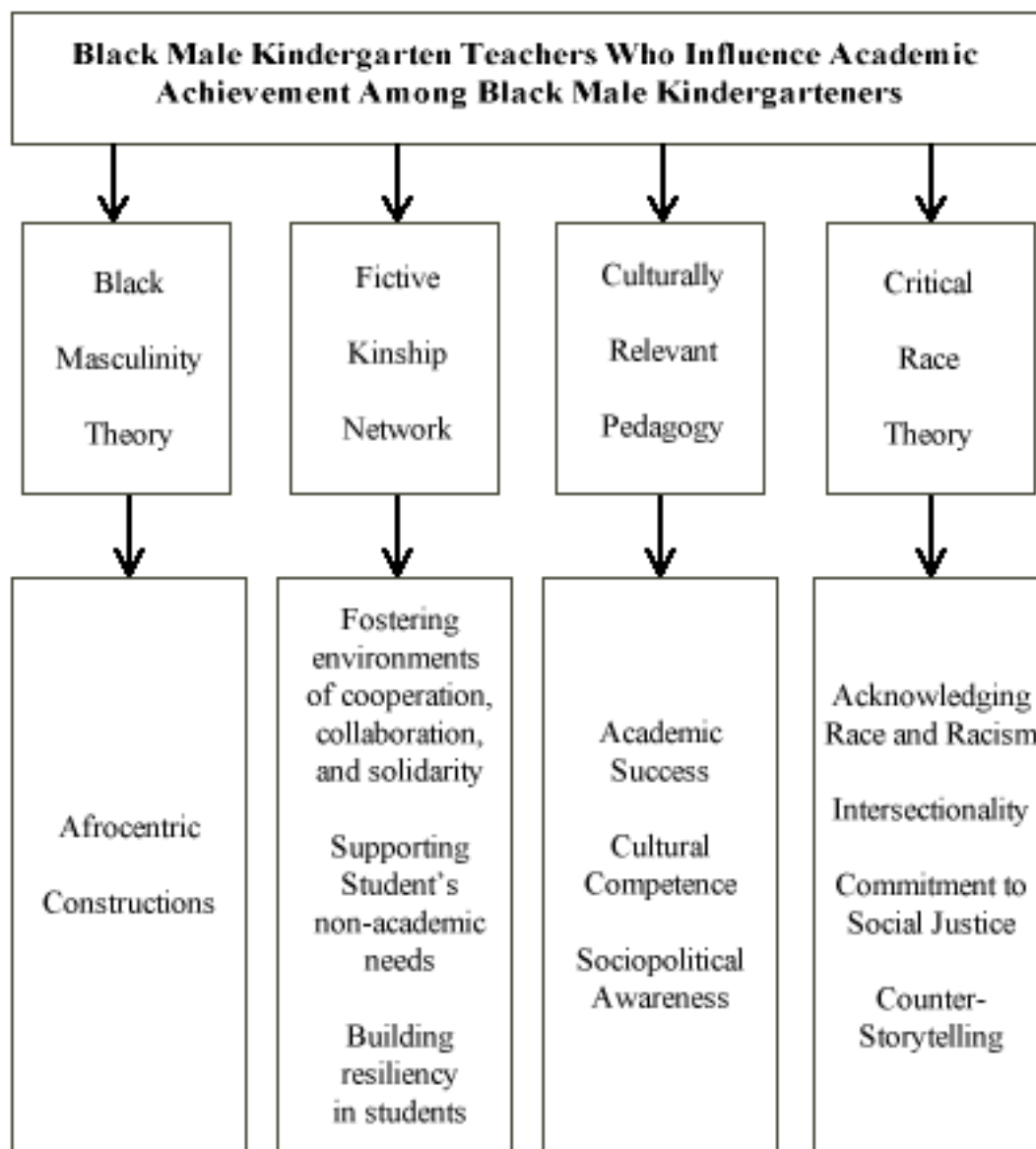
### **Organization of the Dissertation**

This remaining dissertation is organized into ten chapters. Chapter Two consists of the theoretical framework. Chapter Three is the review of related literature. Chapter Four focuses on the methodology of the dissertation followed by Chapter Five which contains the overview of the dissertation findings. Chapters Six- Nine outline the findings of the dissertation. Finally, Chapter Ten presents conclusion, implications, and future research recommendation sections. I now turn to Chapter Two, which outlines the theoretical framework for this study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### Conceptual Framework of Study



Because there is not a single race framework that can adequately depict, explain and/or examine the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers, I use a multi-dimensional theoretical framework (Leonardo, 2013). Drawing from Jaggar and Rothenberg's (1993) work in gender studies where they apply multiple frameworks to examine gender issues in their influential book titled *Feminist Framework*, Leonardo (2013) contends that multidimensional frameworks are essential to providing analytic complexity in race work. He further explains that this complexity should be as complex as the issue of race itself (Leonardo, 2013). Numerous scholars echo the need for multidimensional frameworks to explore Black male teachers. For example, Lynn and Jennings (2009) note that historical and contemporary research on Black teachers, including Black male teachers, has been largely informed by "multiple theoretical viewpoints" (p. 177). Likewise, Brockenbrough (2008) encourages researchers on Black male teachers to employ multidimensional theories in order to illuminate the blind spots in studies and to problematize how these theories may trouble the essentialist and reductionist expectations of Black men teachers to serve as role models for Black boys. Hence, this work is guided by four frameworks which offer a critical, yet holistic, conceptualization on the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers: (1) Black Masculinity; (2) Fictive Kinship; (3) Culturally Relevant Pedagogy; and (4) Critical Race Theory.

First, Black masculinity helps to examine and understand the Black masculine identities, roles, and expectations of Black males as students and teachers in schools and society writ large. Second, the notion of fictive kinship serves to explain the historical, dynamic social relationship between Black educators and their students. Black educators

historically have always played expanded supportive roles in the lives of Black children, which were represented through fictive kinships (Cook, 2010). Fictive kinship networks work against traditional, deficit constructions of Black men teachers where their primary responsibility is to ‘save’ Black children from their ‘culturally deprived’ homes and communities. Thus, it becomes an appropriate framework to describe the dynamic role Black men teachers play in the lives of Black male students. Third, culturally relevant pedagogy serves as an appropriate framework to highlight the pedagogic identities and performance styles that Black male kindergarten teachers utilize in classrooms, and to influence academic achievement outcomes among Black male kindergarteners. Fourth, Critical Race Theory (CRT) addresses issues of race and racism in the professional teaching experiences of Black male teachers in a predominantly White teaching profession. In other words, CRT is an appropriate race framework to explore the experiences of and to describe how Black men view themselves in light of their work as kindergarten teachers in a White female dominant profession (Lynn, 2002). Similarly, CRT provides a framework to explain the essentialist and reductionist positioning of Black male teachers as social change agents in the form of role models for Black male students. Moreover, CRT can be used to understand and discuss the intersectionality of race and gender in attempt to construct Black male kindergarten teachers’ identities and pedagogical styles.

### **Black Masculinity**

Black masculinity scholars contend that there are both deficit and Afrocentric constructions of Black masculinity. I explore first the deficit construction of Black masculinity because this notion is grounded in and serves as one of the reasons Black

men teachers are expected to serve as social change agents for Black students in public schools. It also explains why Black men have been historically seen as the problem for Black boys (Brown, 2009; Jackson et al., 2013). Brown (2011) contends that an historical overview on research regarding Black men describe them as absent fathers who are responsible for the demise of their Black sons. That is, they abandon Black boys and do not provide them the essential tools (i.e., life skills) to survive in society. Such abandonment leads to Black women becoming single mothers who become responsible for raising Black sons (Brown, 2011). Single Black mothers are stereotypically seen as incapable of raising Black boys without the assistance of Black fathers (Brown, 2009).

Therefore, scholars posit that Black male identity is negatively couched in dominant society's construction of the meaning of Black masculinity (hooks, 2004; Hopkins, 1997; McCready & Mosley, 2014; Platt, Holloman, & Watson, 2015). That is, Black men are viewed and are taught to weigh themselves against White-American male conventions (hook, 2004; Howard, 2014; Lynn & Jennings, 2009; Platt et al., 2015). These conventions suggest that White men are the ideal image for Black men (hooks, 2004). hooks<sup>5</sup> (2004) further suggests that for these reasons Black men are often stereotypically considered to be violent, lazy, disengaged, hyper-violent, offensive, aggressive, sexual, and hypersexual. These images have historical roots in the enslavement of African people and were used to justify it (Johns, 2007). They are also reified through media (Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2015). Sealey-Ruiz and Greene (2015) suggest that American film historian Donald Bogle codified many of the stereotypical images including 'Toms' and 'coons' to represent Black men through film. Platt,

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<sup>5</sup> bell hooks does not capitalize her name as a way to differentiate her name from that of her grandmother and to emphasize the importance of her work in academia.

Holloman and Watson (2015) argue that many Black people, particularly Black men, internalize such stereotypes and deficit constructions of Black masculinity and use them to define themselves, giving credence to the power of White Supremacy. Kirkland (2011) adds that these constructions often cause Black men to hate themselves. According to Madhubuti (as quoted in hooks, 2004), “no one actually told men ‘you should hate yourself’. However, the images, symbols, products, creations, promotions, and the authorities of white America all very subtly and often quite openly taught [Black men] white supremacy, taught [them] to hate [themselves]” (p. 36).

Similarly, Howard (2014) and Ladson-Billings (2011) believe that a White supremacist view of Black masculinity has created a love-hate binary for Black men. Thus, Black men are loved when they fit within the White supremacist patriarchal views and conventions of masculinity and are hated when they defy such views (hook, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2011). In other words, Black men are loved when they are involved in and contribute exponentially to athletics and entertainment; however, being Black and male beyond these arena become problematic (Howard, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2011). This binary then provides a clear understanding regarding how some Black males are naturally seen as *good* role models for Black children in schools and society while others are not (Jackson, Boutte, & Wilson, 2013).

Black men became ‘good’ role models for Black boys when Black people rose to the middle-class (Brown, 2012). At this juncture, Black men were seen as possessing the morals and values Black boys needed to succeed in society (Brown, 2009). Such idea helps us understand why Black men are constructed as those individuals who can save Black boys and those who are primarily responsible for disciplining and controlling them

in schools (Ferguson, 2000; Jackson et al., 2013). However, this responsibility is not often given to all Black men, specifically those who identify as queer and/or homosexual (Brockenbrough, 2012a, b). They are often seen as not being the ‘right kind’ of men to serve as role models for Black boys (Brockenbrough, 2012a, b).

Drawing from deficit constructions of Black masculinity, Blassingame (1979) suggest that due to the enslavement of African people, Black men have been emasculated. Blassingame (1979) also contends that enslavement, itself, was created to disempower Black men and to take away their rights and responsibilities as men, fathers, and leaders in society. More pointedly, Black men are seen as lacking the agency to uplift and build their own families and communities (Blassingame, 1979). Therefore, while Black men benefit from the privileges associated with being male in a White, patriarchal society, they benefit less when maleness is coupled with Blackness; thus being denied the privileges associated with being White and male and the positive images that describe them in empowering ways (Howard, 2014).

In contrast to the often static and deficit conceptions of Black males, Afrocentric constructions of Black masculinity prioritize dynamic views of Black men. That is, they emphasize self-actualization, religion and spirituality, connectedness, and cooperation among Black men in such a way that positions them as victors instead of victims in a society that is designed to relegate them to the lowest positions in it (White & Cones, 1999). Black men are seen as being able to take care of personal, familial, and communal responsibilities, despite being face with racial marginalization and discrimination (Jones, 2003).

While some scholars (Jones, 2003; White & Cone, 1999) highlight the benefits of Afrocentric constructions of Black masculinity, other scholars (hooks, 2003; Laubsher, 2005) highlight drawbacks within these constructions. More pointedly, these scholars note essentialist constructions of Black men within Afrocentric constructions. hooks (2004) notes that scholars fail to acknowledge the intersections of Black men along the lines of class, sexuality, and other forms of oppression. Lynn and Jennings (2009) posit that Afrocentric representations of Black masculinity often describe Black men as homophobic and/or in monolithic ways, which suggest that Black men who care for young children are viewed as less masculine and/or not masculine since “caring is essentially a feminine quality” (p. 179). Brockenbrough (2012a, b) contends that conceptions of Black masculinity becomes complex, when efforts to explore it at the intersections of other identities including sexual orientation are often least explored in educational research. This idea complicates the tasks of Black men teachers, particularly those who may self-identify as gay, considering that they, like heterosexual Black men teachers, are expected in some cases to play essential roles in the lives of Black male students in K-12 classrooms (Brockenbrough, 2012a, b). Moreover, Black men, according to hooks (2004) play roles in perpetuating both patriarchal and heterosexist agendas. These agendas promulgate gender domination, thus creating privilege in regards to and constrained relationship with Black women (Lynn, 2006a, b). These constrained relationships lead to high divorce rates among Black men and women and disproportional numbers of single Black female-headed homes (Blassingame, 1979; hooks, 2004).

Thus, Black masculinity theory is important to this study because it showcases Black men teachers working with Black male students in kindergarten classrooms--an



area in education where men, particularly Black, are present. Likewise, other scholars (Harper & Nichols, 2008; Howard, 2014; Howard & Reynolds, 2013) suggest that there is a growing body of educational research that acknowledges the variation among Black men and demonstrates the complex ways masculinity plays out among Black boys in public K-12 schools. Such acknowledgement and demonstration is also needed regarding how Black masculinity plays out among Black male teachers in kindergarten classrooms.

### **Fictive Kinship Network**

Drawn from the field of anthropology, fictive kinship network describes social and economic relationships maintained between individuals who did not naturally have any blood ties (Cook, 2010; Fordham, 1996; Stack, 1974). Often, these relationships were established to provide social, economic, and psychological support to Black families during hardships as a result of poverty and racism (Cook, 2010). According to Cook (2010), the concept of fictive kinship was originally coined by Stack (1974). Stack (1974)'s work demonstrated "the collective adaptations to poverty of women, men, and children within the social-cultural network of the urban black family, and a fictive kinship network was a frame for understanding strategies adopted by the poor to survive" (p. 11). Using an ethnographic methodology, Stack (1974) studied a small impoverished section of a Black community in a Midwestern city finding that Black people engaged in specific adaptive strategies to survive, to obtain resources, and to remain resilient in the face of hardship. Cook (2010) suggests that Stack's work was important in that it differentiated between "natural and social parenthood" (p. 11). Similarly, Fordham (1996) employed and expanded the concept of fictive kinship networks to describe ways

Black community members obtain political clout and prestige in the face of opposition and impediment to their social and political plight.

Employing the contributions of both Fordham (1996) and Stack (1974), Cook (2008) extended the concept of fictive kinship network to the field of education. In so doing, she explored the fictive kinship networks of Black educators during the era of pre- and post- Katrina New Orleans. She found that before Katrina, Black educators had established fictive kinships based on collaboration, cooperation, and solidarity from which they were able to draw during post-Katrina. Moreover, Cook (2010) found that fictive kinship network enabled Black educators to serve as Role Models who were able to advocate and support the non-academic needs of and build resiliency in Black students.

In light of its contribution to the field of education, Cook's conception of fictive kinship networks serves as the basis for this study because of the dynamic way it defines Black culture. Cook's work hinges on three considerations: (1) fostering collaboration, cooperation, and solidarity; (2) advocating and supporting the non-academic needs of Black students; and (3) building resiliency in Black students.

### **Fostering Collaboration, Cooperation, and Solidarity**

According to Cook (2010), fictive kin were educators who knew how to foster collaboration, cooperation, and solidarity in order to meet the social and psychological needs of Black children in urban communities. That is, these educators were well versed at seeking out both human and material resources to ensure the educational needs of Black students were met. These resources were found in Black communities (with which they were familiar and viewed from dynamic instead of deficit understandings) and were

used to support Black children in schools. Moreover, they cared for their students in the same manner they cared for their own children, which positioned them as co-parents or extended ones. They created familial environment within schools, which were also inclusive of Black parents, colleagues, and members of the larger community who were viewed as having integral roles in the educational process and success of students (Cook, 2010).

### **Advocating and Supporting the Non-academic Needs of Black Students**

While the academic needs of Black students are important to fictive kin, the non-academic needs are equally important. To that end, educators who were viewed as fictive kin advocated on behalf of Black students to support their non-academic needs (Cook, 2010; Cook & Williams, 2015). That is, they used their personal financial resources and invested their personal time beyond the walls of schools to support students. They saw the importance of caring for the whole child and knew that fulfilling nonacademic essentials were important to the overall academic success of Black students (Cook, 2010; Cook & Williams, 2015). Such care led to circumventing policies that hinder the academic and social plight of Black children.

### **Building Resiliency in Black Students**

Cook (2010) also contends that the role of educators who are fictive kin is to build resilience in Black students. That is, they understand their “shared background” (p. 17). They shared personal stories from which they drew to inform their pedagogical practices and to build resilience and confidence in their Black students (Cook, 2010; Cook & Williams, 2015). These stories were interwoven throughout the curriculum (Cook, 2010). Fictive kin also knows the importance of “nurturing environment in schools that gave

students the financial, emotional, and social support needed to facilitate learning” (p. 17). They enacted culturally relevant pedagogy in K-12 classrooms (Cook, 2010).

### **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

In light of the historical mismatch between many students’ of color home and school cultures, educational scholars and anthropologists have sought to find ways to bridge the gap between homes and schools for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 1995). There are a multiplicity of labels in the academic literature which describe effective teaching that bridges the gap between the homes and schools of culturally and linguistically diverse students including: “culturally appropriate” (Aronson & Laughter, 2015; Au & Jordan, 1981), “culturally congruent” (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), “culturally responsive” (Cazden & Legett, 1981; Gay, 2000), “culturally compatible” (Jordan, 1985), and “culturally relevant” pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Although there are many conceptions, I draw from Gloria Ladson-Billings’ conception of culturally relevant pedagogy because it is a “pedagogy of opposition, not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160) of Black children, including Black boys (Brown, 2009). In addition, Ladson-Billings’ conception of CRP prioritizes teacher posture or identities and behaviors used to support Black students and paradigms or pedagogical frames of reference used to teach them; whereas, other culturally responsive conceptions focus on teacher practices or instructional strategies used to facilitate teaching and learning (Aronson & Laughter, 2015). For example, as noted by Aronson and Laughter (2015), Gay’s conception of culturally responsive teaching prioritizes teaching, which emphasizes methods teachers should use to be

culturally responsive; whereas, Ladson-Billings' conception focuses on pedagogy as well as teachers' identities, dispositions, and attitudes. Teachers' pedagogical postures and paradigms are important to this study so Ladson-Billings' conceptualization is a better fit.

Drawing from the historical archives on Afrocentric education, multicultural education, Black teacher education, Black womanist/feminist epistemologies, and the scholarship on the lives and pedagogical performances of Black teachers (Banks, 1993; Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lynn, 2006), Gloria Ladson-Billings introduced culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) to the field of education in the late 1990s. Ladson-Billings described CRP as an oppositional pedagogy committed to the collective empowerment of Black students. CRP hinges on three propositions: (a) Student must acquire academic success; (b) Students must develop and sustain cultural competence; and (c) Students must develop critical consciousness.

### **Academic Success**

According to Ladson-Billings (1995), within the CRP construct, academic success is the ability for African-American students to excel in schools by meeting the expected academic goals as outlined by schools. Considering the history of academic failure in schools among African-American children as a result of historically pervasive issues including cultural mismatch, culturally insensitive curricula, and other school-related factors (Boutte, 2015; Milner, 2010b), academic success becomes an important component that should be driven by rigor and the use and application of cultural referents to aid in the teaching and learning process (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This is not simply a “feel good” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009) approach but one that ensures African-

American children gain the appropriate prerequisite skills to navigate school and mainstream society.

### **Cultural Competence**

Black children should also gain an appreciation for their own cultural experience and at least one other culture or they should become what Ladson-Billings refers to as “culturally competent” (Ladson-Billings, 2009). In order to ensure Black children develop such competence, teachers should draw from the wealth and wisdom of Black communities. Because schools are based on White middle-class norms (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Souto-Manning, 2013), culturally relevant conceptions provide African American children with “mirrors” in which to see themselves and windows through which they can see the world (Boutte & Hill, 2006). In other words, culturally relevant teacher provide Black children opportunities to see themselves and their cultural wealth positively reflected in the curriculum, while also seeing the many enriching possibilities within and beyond them.

### **Critical Consciousness**

Ladson-Billings (1995) also suggested that while in the process of acquiring academic success and cultural competence, Black students should also gain sociopolitical awareness. This is an integral part of CRP as schools and society at large are not neutral spaces (Milner, 2009; 2010). By not being neutral, I mean that schools have politically and socially-laced agendas or agendas that maintain the status quo and students must be aware of such lack of neutrality in order to become full participants in this ‘democratic society’ (Banks & Banks, 2005; Milner, 2010b).

In the current age of neoliberal education or free-market, individual, privatized, and competitive markets in education, culturally relevant pedagogy and other culturally responsive paradigms have come under attack (Aronson & Laughter, 2015). That is, the ongoing aim to standardized education has become the nation's priority, often to the detriment of the educational experiences and academic outcomes of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Aronson, 2015; Sleeter, 2012). Sleeter (2006) outlines three goals for combating neoliberal attacks against public education including: (a) evidence-based research that neatly ties and/or connects culturally relevant/responsive practices to student academic outcomes; (b) highly visible displays of culturally relevant practices in schools and classrooms for parents, administrators, and other stakeholders; and (c) new debates, discourses, and discussions about educational reform in historically neglected communities.

In her recent works, Ladson-Billings (2014) acknowledges Paris' (2012) culturally sustaining pedagogy, which puts forth the idea of sustaining global identities of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Reinforcing this extension of culturally relevant pedagogy, Ladson-Billing (2014) argues that educators should be taught to embrace global identities in classrooms, while also embracing the cultural and artistic forms including art, music, and spoken word that shape them. Although culturally sustaining pedagogy or an idea that supports pedagogical practices that sustains "linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as a part of the democratic project of school" (Paris, 2012, p. 93) is a growing extension of culturally relevant pedagogy, I do not consider culturally sustaining pedagogy in this work because it is nearly impossible to move on to a newer conceptions of CRP, when most Black and White

teachers have not explored, considered, and/or mastered the original conception of culturally relevant pedagogy in public school classrooms to produce high-achievement student academic outcomes (Aronson & Laughter, 2015; Howard, 1999; Matias, 2013). It would be comparable to ‘putting the cart before the horse.’ Boutte (2015) cosigns this idea and points out Black children are presently not doing well in schools, because most teachers are unable to acknowledge, value, and draw from the cultural wealth Black children bring to classrooms by enacting culturally relevant pedagogy. Further, Boutte (2015) and Ladson-Billings (2014) suggest the CRP is foundational to future culturally relevant frameworks. That is, it has stood the test of time, allotting space on which future scholars can build to improve the academic, cultural competence, sociopolitical awareness of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Further, this idea does not suggest that culturally relevant pedagogy cannot be generative; however, newer iterations (i.e., *culturally sustaining pedagogy*) also focus on the three dimensions inclusive in culturally relevant pedagogy (Boutte, 2015).

While Paris (2012) critiques Ladson-Billings’ conception of culturally relevant pedagogy for essentializing the experiences of Black people, particularly children, Boutte (2015) notes that Paris’ (2012) conception of culturally sustaining pedagogy essentializes the experiences of youth from culturally and linguistically assuming that all youth engage in hip-hop culture. Indeed, the concept of essentializing brings with it a tension of figuring out how to discuss both generic and idiosyncratic aspects of cultural groups and the difficulty of trying to capture variations within cultures while also acknowledging cultural legacies, dimensions, and complexities (Boutte, 2015).



## **Critical Race Theory**

Before I explore Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework, I provide a brief overview of Critical Legal Studies (CLS) because the CLS movement gave birth to CRT. Because many scholars of color in the CLS movement perceived it a weak analysis of structural inequities that excluded the issue of race, they argued for a framework that prioritized race and racism. Therefore, they used CRT to critique and respond to CLS (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Lynn & Jennings, 2009).

### **Critical Legal Studies**

Emerging in the mid to late 1970's, Critical Legal Studies (CLS) was theorized by a predominantly White group of neo-Marxist attorneys who also participated in the Civil Rights Movement (Brown & Jackson, 2013). Critical race scholars (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Lynn & Dixon, 2013) argue that these critical legal scholars perceived their work to be an extension of the Civil Rights Movement, which purported to address key social and political issues that happened during the Civil Rights era, and problematize the social capital of the most wealthy and powerful individuals in the U.S. According to Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas (1995), Brown and Jackson (2013), and Lynn and Jennings (2009), in doing so, they argued against the neutrality of the law, and proposed an argument that suggested a social hierarchy was created in the U.S. that established benefits through U.S. laws and policies for those who had the greatest amount of capital wealth, while, at the same time, imposing social injustices on those who had the least amount of capital wealth.

With such considerations in mind, CLS scholars worked against these biased laws and policies from which those in power benefited. However, CLS scholars of color

including Derrick Bell, Kimberle Crenshaw, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, James Calmore, Patricia Williams, Richard Delgado, and Cheryl Harris, asserted that the CLS movement did not adequately theorize the role race and racism played in the dominant social and power relations (Cook & Dixon, 2013; Crenshaw et al., 1995). Professor Derrick Bell, one of the leading critical scholars and the father of CRT, argued that race and racism needed to serve as an essential critique of U.S. social, political, and historical structures to better explain the social injustices that existed therein (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Dixon & Rousseau, 2006). Thus, the Critical Race Theory movement was formed through the writings of Professor Derrick Bell along with Mari Matsuda, Richard Delgado, Angela Harris and Kimberly Crenshaw and moved across disciplines including the field of education where the educational writings of Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate informed the research and praxis of educational scholars (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006).

### **Critical Race Theory in Education**

Two decades ago, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) introduced Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education. Critical race scholars (Cook, 2013; Cook & Dixon, 2013; Lynn & Dixon, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Leonardo, 2013; Milner, 2007) contended that the introduction of CRT to the field of education was timely and essential in that it provided a needed critique of the poor and inequitable schooling experiences of children of color. Jay (2009) suggested that CRT has not only been useful in examining the inequitable schooling experiences of children of color, but has become a powerful theoretical and analytic tool to expose the inequitable experiences of teachers and school administrators of color alike. Cook (2015) added that CRT has also been

useful in its social, cultural, and historical analysis of teacher education and teacher education research because race has been under-theorized therein.

Similar to its foundational work in the field of law, CRT in education prioritizes race and racism as contributing factors to social injustices in the field of education. Milner (2007) acknowledges CRT as an oppositional framework against traditional scholarship that tends to ignore and/or downplay both the historical and contemporary effects of race and racism in the public schooling experiences of children of color. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) described CRT as a response to the under-theorization of race and racism in education. In other words, CRT, as a theoretical framework, provides educators and educational scholars an appropriate language to talk about race (Lynn, 2002). Lynn and Parker (2006) and Sleeter and Delgado Bernal (2002) posited that CRT even strengthened multicultural education frameworks (Banks, 1971; Banks & Banks, 1995) that inadequately addressed racial inequality. For example, Ladson-Billings (2013) and Lynn and Parker (2006) asserted that CRT provided scholars a racial analytic tool that moved beyond trite gender and class analyses (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Weiler, 1988) that could no longer fully explain the injustices students of color experience in public schools on a daily basis.

Because race and racism are consistently at the center in CRT research, CRT scholars surmise that educators, scholars and researchers can better understand and explain both qualitatively and quantitatively pervasive ‘academic achievement gaps’ and opportunity gaps between children of color and their White counterparts; disproportional representation of Black and Brown students in special education; inequitable school funding; neoliberalism in education; inequitable school policies; racialized experiences of

teachers and administrators of color; inequitable school funding; and other racialized phenomena in the U.S. public school system (Buras, 2013; Hartlep & Ellis, 2011; Jay, 2009; Lynn, 2002; Milner, 2010b). In sum, CRT can be used to provide new ways race and racism can be theorized in both the experiences of teachers, administrators, and students of color (Cook, 2015; Lynn & Parker, 2006).

According to Cook (2013), Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), Lynn and Dixon (2013), and Milner (2010), CRT hinges on eight tenets in education including (1) the permanence of race and racism; (2) the challenge of colorblindness, meritocracy, and neutrality; (3) the intersections of race and racism with other forms of oppression; (4) the validation of the voices, stories, narratives and counterstories/narratives of those who have been historically marginalized; (5) the examination of Whiteness as property; (6) the examination of interest convergence; (7) a commitment to social justice; and (8) the interdisciplinary nature of CRT. Below I provide a brief explanation of each tenet and its contribution to this study on the constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers.

### **The Permanence of Race and Racism**

Critical race scholars believe that race is endemic to American society (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Lynn & Dixon, 2013; Lynn, 2002; Lynn & Parker, 2006). Because race and racism are permanent structures therein, they naturally and ordinarily manifest themselves in institutional and structural policies that continue to keep Black people and other people of color at the “bottom of the well” (Bell, 1992; Lynn & Parker, 2006). Put differently, according to Lynn (2002), race and racism is “a cancer festering beneath the social surface of the American landscape” (p. 120). While

this festering cancer negatively affects and damage Black people in the process, White people continue to maintain concomitant privileges and benefits (McIntosh, 1992). As a result, CRT scholars (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), contend that Black people will never gain racial and socioeconomic parity with White people in society and schools. However, Bell (1992) asserted that Black people can truly experience liberation from racial oppression when they come to understand the reality of race and racism. He further acknowledged that such realization should encourage and challenge Black people to work against race and racism and its oppressive structures. The permanence of race and racism provides an explanation for why the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers are described in similar ways as those of White male (and female) teachers (Bryan & Browder, 2013). Early childhood research emphasizes the pedagogical practices of White and Eurocentric men in early childhood classrooms. Therefore, White male teachers possess the ‘right’ identities and pedagogical styles for young children in some cases (Bryan & Browder, 2013). Black male teachers enact pedagogies of experiences or draw from their personal pasts to shape the way they work with Black males and other students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Brown, 2009; Lynn, 2006). To liberate themselves from these White construction of identities and pedagogical styles, Black male kindergarten teachers’ identity and pedagogical “program of emancipation would have to be built around race first” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 62). That is, they must be able to understand and embed into their pedagogies the ways race and racism shape, have shaped and continue to shape their lives and the lives of Black male students (Howard, 2014; Lynn, 2006).

### **The Challenge of Colorblindness, Meritocracy, and Neutrality**

CRT speaks against liberal ideologies including colorblindness, meritocracy, and neutrality that promote a false sense of racial equality among Black and White people in America and its institutions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). On one hand, colorblindness is an ideology that clearly insists that due to significant racial progress, laws and policies are objective and race-neutral, and race and other identity factors should not be acknowledged. On the other hand, race and racism are reified through institutional policies and practices (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2010b). The notion of meritocracy suggests that if people of color work hard, they can achieve the so-called American dream (Milner, 2010b). This idea does not take into account the structural and institutional barriers in the forms of policies and practices that hinder the upward mobility of people of color, and the privileges and advantages the dominant group have over subordinate groups (Howard, 2014; Milner, 2010b). Lastly, the idea of neutrality serves to camouflage the racist intent, interest, and ideology of dominant groups in the United States (Howard, 2014). In kindergarten classrooms, White male and female kindergarten teachers may negate the racialized experiences of Black male kindergarten teachers by suggesting that experiences of all kindergarten teachers are the same, regardless of race.

### **The Intersectionality of Race and Racism with Other Forms of Oppression**

Critical Race Theory scholars (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Stovall, 2013; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009) believe that race and racism intersect with other forms of oppression including gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, and national origin. Drawing from a Black feminist

stance, Crenshaw (1989, 1991), the originator of the concept “intersectionality”, noted that identity-based politics often ignores or conflates intragroup differences. Specifically, Crenshaw uncovered the complexity of the multidimensional identities of Black women based on their race and gender in a White male dominant/patriarchal, capitalistic society (Howard & Reynolds, 2013). Ladson-Billings (2013) contends that when people ignore or conflate intragroup differences, they essentialize oppressed groups or “[perceive them] to be in a single, think, act, and believe the same things in the same ways” (p. 40). Stovall (2013) also suggests that the focus of intersectionality is not to determine which oppressed groups are more oppressed than the other, but it should help to determine and locate how forms of oppression converge and diverge based on oppressive situations and contexts. Howard and Reynolds (2013) found that “a limitation with the work on Black males has been a failure to unpack what it means to be (both) *Black* and *male*” (p. 233). The literature has primarily operated as if Black males are a monolithic group (Howard & Reynolds, 2013). This notion is also true in relations to Black male teachers (Brockenbrough, 2008; Brown, 2012; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010). For example, the literature has ignored that in a kindergarten classroom, the intersections of Black, male, and teacher may bring about different individual and collective racial and gendered ramifications than White male (or female) teacher does or than a Black female does. Thus, exploring intersectionality in this study helps educators to know what it means to be Black, male, and kindergarten teacher in a field dominated by White women and how these intersections influence the academic achievement academic and social outcomes of Black male students.

## **The Validation of Counternarratives**

Historically, the voices, stories, and narratives of people of color have been silenced in mainstream discourses, debates, and discussions (Cook, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In other words, dominant narratives or stories that most people in American society believe to be true have been given more credence than the stories of people of color in society and schools (Cook & Dixon, 2013; Howard, 2014; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Therefore, CRT centers and prioritizes the voices of those who have been historically oppressed or those individuals being at the “bottom” as a way to de-center and challenge dominant White narrative about them (Bell, 1995; Cook & Dixon, 2013). Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado and Crenshaw (1993) posit that those who are at the “bottom” and “lack material wealth and political power still have access to thought and language” (p. 65). Lynn and Jennings (2009) further add that CRT positions “Black subjects as both narrator and subject” (p. 179) of their stories. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) contend that counterstorytelling is “a kind of medicine to heal the wounds of pain caused by racial oppression” (p. 57), and gives power to individuals to name their own reality in the world. James Cone (2010) implies that to engage in counter-storytelling is “to let suffering speak, let victims be visible, and let social misery be put on the agenda of those in power” (p. 180). In the field of education, the voices of Black male teachers, particularly Black male (kindergarten) teachers, have been excluded from mainstream research on male teachers, thus prioritizing the voices of White male (and female) teachers (Bryan & Browder, 2013; Lynn, 2006). Therefore, this study elicits the voices of Black male kindergarten teachers who have been historically silenced, and gives them the power to name their own reality in kindergarten classrooms.



## **The Examination of Whiteness as Property**

Bell (1992) and Donnor (2013) posited that White people and whiteness are set aside as private property in the United States. In others words, White people benefit from a set of privileges due to their phenotypical appearance and sociopolitical status (Harris, 1995). This idea also plays itself out in schools at the expense of children and teachers of color. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) theorized that those with “better property are entitled to better schools” (p. 54). Moreover, they suggested that curriculum represents a property right, considering that “the quality and quantity of the curriculum varies with the ‘property values’ of the school” (p. 54). The white hoarding of material resources including facilities, computers, and ‘highly qualified’ teachers also support this intellectual property right in schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Therefore, White children and teachers benefit largely from educational theory, policy and practices that grant privileges, while such advantages are denied to children and teachers of color. Since the teaching profession is predominantly White and female (Price-Dennis & Souto-Manning, 2011), White female teachers are often granted benefits and rights that are denied to Black teachers, particularly Black male teachers. For example, on one hand, because being a White female teacher is the expected norm and/or a property right in kindergarten classrooms, she is easily accepted and embraced in the eyes of White, Black, and other parents of color. Contrastingly, Black male teachers may not be easily accepted in the eyes of White and Black parents and may be seen as ‘suspicious’ and/or ‘dangerous’ (Lynn, 2006). Despite the assumption of Whiteness as the norm, Black male kindergarten teachers, like Black people in general, are a part of a historical legacy of oppressed and suffering people who demonstrate the ability to overcome despite such

negative perceptions and/ or stereotypes against them (Butchart, 2010). In other words, some Black male teachers, despite and in the face of opposition, demonstrate the ability to influence the academic outcomes of Black male students in kindergarten classrooms (Brown, 2009a).

### **Interest Convergence**

Critical race scholars (Bell, 1992; Milner, Pearman, & McGee, 2013) acknowledge the notion of interest convergence. Bell (1988, 1992) originated the idea of interest convergence. In so doing, he used the *Brown vs. Board of Education (1954)* decision that rendered *de jure* segregation of public schools illegal to fully argue his point. Bell explained that the *Brown* decision “was not the result of a moral breakthrough but a decision that was necessary to advance American Cold War objectives... to quell the threat of domestic disruption that was a legitimate concern with Black veterans... and to facilitate desegregation in the South” (Milner et al., 2013, p. 339). In other words, Bell suggested that school integration was used as a ploy to sanitize American’s unsanitary image internationally instead of demonstrating a moral necessity to integrate public schools. Therefore, Bell (1988) and Milner, Pearman, and McGee (2013) posited that interest convergence refers to the idea that the interest of Black people is only accommodated when it converges with those of Whites (p. 339). For example, most White people theoretically support the recruitment and retention of Black male teachers to K-12 classrooms largely because they view it as benefiting the school since Black male teachers are traditionally expected to “discipline” and “control” Black children for most White teachers who are unable to do so (Howard, 1999; Jackson et al., 2013). When Black male teachers counter White ideologies or work against whom White teachers’

desire them to be, they are often seen as the problem instead of the solution (Bryan & Browder, 2013).

### **The Commitment to Social Justice**

Critical Race Theory addresses various forms of oppression including racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and other tools of domination. Chapman (2013) argues that social justice is an embedded function in CRT; therefore, CRT research cannot be separated from a social justice agenda. Said differently, CRT is social justice work (Chapman, 2013). Dr. Martin L. King (1988) professed that to do social justice work is “to choose to give [one’s] life for those who have been left out of the sunlight of opportunity” and such work requires one “to do something for others” (p. 524). He further suggested that engaging in social justice work for the least of those in society was a way of putting on cemetery clothes or finding something worth for which to die (West & Buschendorf, 2014). Similarly, connecting social justice and political praxis to the Christian faith, Cone (1997) asserted that, “I know what your faith is, not by what you confess but only by what you do” (p. 157). The commitment to social justice is important to this study because it helps de-marginalize the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers whose identities and pedagogical styles have been historically marginalized in extant research (Brown, 2009, 2011; Lynn, 2006). This research becomes my way of choosing to give my life and work for those who have been left out of the sunlight (Cone, 1988; King, 1988).

### **The Interdisciplinary Nature of CRT**

Critical Race Theory emphasizes the importance of drawing from and incorporating knowledge from a multiplicity of disciplines in order to fully understand

the pervasive nature and manifestations of all forms of discrimination. Critical Race scholars (Crenshaw, 1986; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Romero, 2013) have drawn from disciplines including women and gender studies, ethnic studies, and sociological to better understand discrimination. Considering that few Critical Race Theoretical studies have drawn from Black masculinity studies to understand discrimination, this study adds to such understanding and demonstrate the potential Black masculinity studies have in helping educators understand discrimination, particularly for Black men in kindergarten classrooms.

Scholars (Lynn & Jennings, 2009) who have previously explored Black male teachers have found most of the eight tenets of CRT useful in their studies. To that end, I find five tenets useful in this study including: (a) permanence of race and racism; (b) challenging colorblindness; (c) the intersectionality of race and racism with other forms of oppression; (d) the validation of counternarratives; and (e) the commitment to social justice. They all have been useful in the construction of the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers in the South.

Like many theories, CRT has evolved. Lynn and Jennings (2009) contend that CRT has evolved as both a theory and method. That is, CRT is a theoretical tool that helps to explain race and racism in societal institutions, while it also can be used to challenge race and racism embedded within conventional research traditions and methodologies (Lynn & Jennings, 2009; Lynn, Jennings, & Hughes, 2013). Moreover, there are other critical race pedagogical frameworks including critical race pedagogy that have been introduced to the field of education and could be useful and essential in exploring the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers.

However, I am not suggesting that the Black male teachers in this study engaged in Critical Race Pedagogical practices. Ladson-Billings (2013) contends that there are scholars, teachers, and activists who engage in race work while others engage in critical race work. In other words, Ladson-Billings (2013) asserts, “We must be clear that just because a scholar looks at race in her work does not make her a critical race theorist” (p. 36). The same is true for K-12 teachers who may discuss and/or address issues of race and racism in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2013). The Black male kindergarten teachers in this study engage in race work, not critical race work, despite understanding how their lives and the lives of Black boys are critically raced. Similarly, K-12 teachers who look at culture do not necessarily equate it to using culturally relevant pedagogy in classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

### **Critical Race Pedagogy**

The evolution of Critical Race Pedagogy (CRP) is inclusive of and captures specific ways teachers of color draw from their experiential knowledge to “to construct critical race pedagogies that construct a critique of racism in education while also putting forth some ideas about how to address race and racism in the classroom” (Lynn & Jennings, 2009, p. 179). Critical Race Pedagogy, then, prioritizes transformative ways teachers of color can make schools equitable spaces for children of color by helping them understand the hegemonic, oppressive, and repressive structures that are the root cause of their disenfranchisement in schools and society writ large (Lynn, 1999; Lynn, Jennings & Hughes, 2013). Jennings and Lynn (2005) and Lynn and Jennings (2009) outline five important CRP tenets:

1. CRP must recognize and understand the endemic nature of race and racism (Jennings & Lynn, 2005, p. 25).
2. CRP must be intimately cognizant of the necessary intersection of other oppressive constructs such as class, gender, and sexual orientation (Jennings & Lynn, 2005, p. 26).
3. CRP must recognize the importance of understanding the power dynamics inherent in schooling (Jennings & Lynn, 2005, p. 26).
4. CRP must emphasize the importance of reflexivity and the exploration of one's place within a stratified society to illuminate oppressive structures (Jennings & Lynn, 2006, p. 26).
5. CRP must encourage the practice of an explicitly liberatory form of both teaching and learning, advocating for justice and equity in both schooling and education as a necessity if there is to be justice and equity in the broader society (p. 27-28).

To reiterate, Ladson-Billings (2013) contends there are individuals who engage in race work and others critical race work. To that end, few educational scholars on Black male teachers (Johnson, 2014; Lynn & Jennings, 2009) have explored the Critical Race Pedagogical identities and practices of Black male teachers in K-12 classrooms.

### **Towards A Multidimensional Framework on Black Male Kindergarten Teachers**

Considering that Black Masculinity, Fictive Kinship Network, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, and Critical Race theory have been largely used individually and/or collectively in educational research to explore the experiences of Black male teachers and students (Brown, 2009, 2012; Ferguson, 2000; Howard, 2014; Lynn, 2006; Lynn &

Jennings, 2009), an amalgamation of these theories can help educators and educational researchers better understand the complex and multifaceted positions of Black male teachers in relation to Black males students and how Black male teachers influence their academic outcomes. Thus, it becomes important to explore how these theories converge and diverge in order to better arrive at these understandings. A more thorough discussion follows where I detail how each theory converges and diverges, one with the other. I first explore the relationship between Black masculinity and Fictive Kinship.

**Black Masculinity and Fictive Kinship.** There are at least two constructions of Black masculinity cited in the academic literature (Fagan, 2001; Frazier, 1948; hooks, 2004). That is, whereas some scholars (Fagan, 2001; Frazier, 1948) draw from deficit constructions of Black masculinity, others (hooks, 2004) draw from Afrocentric constructions of Black masculinity. On one hand, deficit constructions of Black masculinity emphasize negative ideology regarding Black men (Fagan, 2001; Frazier, 1948). In other words, Black men are stereotypically perceived as deviant, pathological, violent, hypersexual, dangerous, and brutes (Howard, 2014). These negative, historical descriptors in research literature have largely informed how Black men presently are and have been positioned in society (Brown, 2011). In addition, many scholars (Frazier, 1948; Moynihan, 1958) further extend such deficit understandings by noting that Black men are absent from the lives of their children. This idea has led many individuals to falsely believe that Black men contribute to the demise of their Black sons in schools and society writ large (Brown, 2009; Howard, 2014). Stereotypically, Black boys are not seen any differently than their ‘unsalvageable,’ ‘absent,’ and ‘no-good’ Black fathers, thus, contributing to their ‘dismal’ experiences in schools (Brown, 2009, 2012; Howard, 2014).

Deficit constructions of Black masculinity are widely used to describe Black men instead of Afrocentric constructions of Black masculinity (hooks, 2004).

On the other hand, Afrocentric constructions of Black masculinity describe Black men as empowered and regard them from dynamic perspectives (hooks, 2004). That is, they highlight Black men as those who uplift their families, homes, and communities (White & Cones, 1999). Black men are seen as responsible caregivers, providers for their families, and are heavily involved in the lives of their children. Since these positive descriptors are rarely used to describe Black men, negative depictions contribute to the maintenance of White supremacist agendas and individual and collective attacks against Black men and families (hooks, 2004). Yet, Afrocentric Black masculinity challenges the White supremacist, deficit nature of Black masculinity (hooks, 2004). It acknowledges the role race, racism, and racial injustice has played in negatively shaping the lives of Black men in American society. To that end, descriptions of Black males are not dichotomous and are sometimes conflicting—mentioning assets, while also pointing out deficits.

With such considerations in mind, I argue that Black masculinity and fictive kinship converge as theories. That is, the Afrocentric constructions of Black masculinity shape the construction of Black male teachers as fictive kin. Fictive kinship is also in alignment with educational research literature (Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1996, 2000) that draws from Afrocentric constructions of Black masculinity to describe Black male teachers as Role Models or individuals who drew from dynamic perspectives as they taught and worked with Black male students in segregated Black schools. During segregated schooling, Black male teachers (and administrators) served as Role Models



for Black male students to empower, not ‘save’, them (Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1996, 2000). They played essential roles in helping Black male students develop academic success, cultural competence, and critical (race) consciousness (Foster, 1997). They created environments of collaboration, cooperation, and solidarity in their classrooms and built resiliency among Black students (Cook, 2010; Siddle-Walker, 1996).

Moreover, Black masculinity and fictive kinship diverge. That is, because fictive kinship is a framework that draws from dynamic perspectives relative to Black communities and their abilities to survive in the face of opposition, it is antithetical to the deficit constructions of Black masculinity. The deficit construction of Black masculinity shape and have shaped the way Black male students are and have been negatively viewed in schools, thus needing and positioning Black men teachers to ‘save them’ (Brown, 2012; Ferguson, 2000). Said differently, given that Black male students are stereotypically seen as discipline problems and are being disproportionality suspended and expelled from schools as early as preschool among other adverse conditions (i.e., low academic performance and disproportional assignments to special education) and that these conditions shape their sense of the Black masculine self (Ferguson, 2000; Howard, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2014), Black male teachers have been constructed as those who can ‘save’ Black boys from their ‘unsalvageable’ conditions. Brown (2012) refers to these Black men teachers as pedagogical kinds. In other words, whereas Black male students have been constructed as human kinds who are ‘socially abnormal’ and ‘culturally deviant,’ Black male teachers have been stereotypically constructed as pedagogical kinds “whose subjectivities, pedagogies, expectations have been set in place

prior to entering the classroom” (p. 299). The nature of the pedagogical kind entails Black male teachers serving to discipline and control Black students, mainly Black male students, more so than provide them the pre-requisite academic skills to be successful in and beyond schools (Brown, 2012). Brown (2012) contends that “the [Black] male teacher possess a rugged manhood that is needed to govern and administer the unruly Black boy” (p. 310). These dominant discourses position Black male teachers as “enclosed within the pedagogical project of Black boy redemption” (p. 212) or the only body who is capable of tending to ‘culturally deprived’ and ‘socially abnormal’ Black male students (Brown, 2012). Such idea has catapulted clarion calls to increase the number of Black males in public K-12 classrooms. Brown (2012) argues that the shift regarding Black men from ‘problems’ to ‘solutions’ for Black boys did not occur until Black people unexpectedly ascended to the middle-class in record numbers in the mid-1990’s. Thus, Brown (2012) contends that most Black educated man from middle-class backgrounds have been stereotypically positioned to reach Black boys. *Call Me Mister*<sup>6</sup> and other Black male teacher recruitment programs (e.g., Obama’s *Black Men to the Blackboard*<sup>7</sup>) have been complicit in creating a narrative about the ‘absent’ Black father and carrying out an agenda to ‘save Black boys (and girls)’ (Jones & Jenkins, 2012). Over recent decades, this idea of social change agents (i.e., role models, father figures) has become virtually a singular image of Black male teachers in public schools as a

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<sup>6</sup> Started at Clemson University, *Call Me Mister* is a Black male teacher recruitment initiative with the intended goal of recruiting a more diverse pool of teachers to the field of education by providing tuition assistance, academic, social, and cultural support, and job placement to its participants.

<sup>7</sup> Initiated by President Barack Obama’s Administration, *Black Men To The Blackboard* was created to increase the percentage of Black male teachers from less than 2 percent of those who currently work in education to 5 percent by 2020 to address/redress the current academic and social outcomes among Black boys in K-12 schools.

response to the ‘dismal’ academic and social outcomes of Black male students (Brown, 2012).

Similarly, Black men are socially constructed as a group by society. In other words, they are fictively connected that way as well. While essentialist constructions of Black male teachers silence the way Black male teachers theorize their own practices (Brockenbrough, 2008; Brown, 2012), they also silence and limit the way Black male students and family members theorize the identities and pedagogical practices of Black male teachers. Some Black male students and family members understand the critical schooling and societal experiences Black male students face, and see the benefits of having Black male teachers in classrooms (Hopkins, 1997; Howard, 2014). To that end, I argue that when Black male teachers are viewed as fictive kin in relations to Black male students, they are able to positively influence the academic outcomes among Black male students (Brown, 2009). However, in order to positively influence academic achievement outcomes among Black male students and for Black family members to see the benefits of them, Black male teachers must engage in what Ladson-Billings (1995, 2009) refers to as ‘culturally relevant pedagogy’ or teaching that draws from the cultural wealth of Black children to produce academic success, cultural competence, and critical awareness. I now explore the convergences and divergences between Fictive kinship and Culturally relevant pedagogy.

**Fictive Kinship and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.** Considering the dynamic construction out of which fictive kinship is drawn (Cook, 2012), Black male teachers who are fictive kin can be considered culturally relevant pedagogues because culturally relevant teaching entails drawing from dynamic perspectives about Black people to

positively impact the schooling experiences of Black children (cultural competence) (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Therefore, fictive kinship and culturally relevant pedagogy converge. In other words, fictive kinship aligns to the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy, which highlight Black people and their communities from dynamic perspectives to inform teaching and learning for Black and other students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Black people and communities are seen as sites of cultural wealth from which teachers can draw to build bridges between what students know and what they need to know (Aronson & Laughter, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Fictive kin are those individuals who build on such concepts by providing social, economic, and psychological support to Black children (Cook, 2010). Therefore, teachers who are fictive kin and culturally relevant pedagogues including Black male teachers (Cook, 2010; Lynn, 2006) are not constructed as those who ‘save’ Black males and other students, but instead, those who empower them to excel academically, to develop cultural competence, and to develop critical consciousness in the face of oppression. These teachers, themselves, are critically conscious and culturally informed and recognize that Black children are a part of their ‘fictive’ families (Boutte, 2015; Cook, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Like culturally relevant teachers, fictive kin addresses issues of race and racism in their teaching to build resilience in Black students (Cook, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Thus, fictive kin and culturally relevant pedagogues work against a traditional, racist, and White supremacist curriculum and schooling practices that marginalize Black children and their communities (Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billing, 2009). To note one way fictive kinship and culturally relevant pedagogy diverge, it is important to underscore that while culturally relevant teachers have served as fictive kin to Black

students, Ladson-Billings (2009) does not specifically name culturally relevant teachers ‘fictive kin.’ To that end, Black male teachers, who are fictive kin, serve as culturally relevant teachers who understand the importance of helping Black children, Black male students in this case, achieve academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. However, while teachers must understand, appreciate, and value the cultural self of Black students and other students from culturally and linguistically backgrounds and how it impacts teaching and learning (Ladson-Billings, 2009), they must also understand, appreciate, and value the masculine or gendered ‘self’ of Black male students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). I explore convergences and divergences of culturally relevant pedagogy and Black masculinity.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Black Masculinity.** Considering that culturally relevant pedagogy is drawn from Afrocentric and Black feminist perspectives, culturally relevant pedagogical scholarship (Brown, 2009, 2012; Lynn, 2006a, b) rarely accounts for the Afrocentric construction of Black masculinity in most cases. I focus on the Afrocentric construction of Black masculinity, because in light of the nature of culturally relevant pedagogy to uplift Black students and communities (Ladson-Billings, 2009), it would be impossible to consider deficit constructions of Black masculinity. Ladson-Billings (1995, 2009) in her original study which explored culturally relevant teachers did not include Black men teachers, thus limiting the need to explore Black masculinity in terms of Black male teachers. However, considering that Black male students were present in classrooms of these culturally relevant women teachers, Black masculinity was somewhat a component of the study. To highlight men teachers, Lynn (2006) explored culturally relevant Black men teachers but seems to suggest that Black

men teachers should embody pedagogical identities and characteristics of Black women teachers to support Black children in K-12 classrooms. In other words, Black male teacher should learn from Black women teachers (not that this idea is problematic) to embody and develop similar identities and enact pedagogies in the same way Black women teacher do as they engage in culturally relevant pedagogy (Lynn, 2006a, b). This idea is not to essentialize the experiences of culturally relevant Black women teachers. It is clear in the academic literature that Black women experience life differently at the intersections of race, gender, and other subordinations (Berry, 2008; Crenshaw, 1988). However, Lynn (2006) suggests that Black men should embody the identities and characteristics of culturally relevant Black women teachers, despite research studies that emphasize the different lived experiences between Black women and men at the intersections of race and gender. Culturally relevant Black men teachers have demonstrated their abilities to draw from their personal lived experiences that have shaped their lives as both Black and male to teach Black students, particularly Black boys (Brown, 2009; 2012; Lynn et al., 1999).

Ladson-Billings (1994, 2009), within the critical consciousness component of CRP, posited that while students of color must understand how their lives are raced, they must also understand how their lives are gendered. However, Bristol (2015) has questioned how and if culturally relevant pedagogy is gender-relevant to Black male students. Brown (2009) added that while scholars explore Black male teachers who are culturally relevant, they have undertheorized ways culturally relevant teaching impacts Black male students in public school classrooms. In other words, Ladson-Billings' (2009) conception of CRP neither acknowledged ways Black male students learn differently

from Black female students nor acknowledges the varying identities and pedagogies that may be needed to pedagogically engage and support Black male students in public school classrooms. However, there is a growing body of research studies (Sampson, Gresham, & Leigh, & Meyers, 2014) which demonstrate differences in the teaching and learning process of males and females. Clearly, while culturally relevant pedagogy works against colorblind ideologies in schools and school curricula (Ladson-Billings, 2009), it rarely works against gender-blind ideologies (Bristol, 2015). More pointedly, educational scholars need to know how gender-relevant, culturally relevant pedagogy is in the teaching and learning process of Black and other students from culturally and linguistic diverse background. Gender relevance in school curriculum is particularly important for Black boys, as there is a growing body of research that aims to find solutions to curtail their ‘dismal’ schooling experiences at all grade levels (Dancy, 2014; Howard, 2014; Kunjufu, 2013). Indeed, Black boys are the most victimized and disenfranchised in schools as they are most likely to score significantly lower than their White and Black female counterparts on national and state-level assessments and are most likely to be suspended and expelled from schools (Bristol, 2015; Dancy, 2014; Fashola, 2005; Hopkins, 1997; Howard, 2014; Kunjufu, 2013). However, Critical Race Theory enables educators and educational scholars to explore the intersections of Black and male to examine the academic and social needs of Black boys in public K-12 schools (Howard, 2014; Reynolds, 2010). I explore the convergences and divergences of Critical Race Theory and Black masculinity.

**Critical Race Theory and Black Masculinity.** Scholarship on Critical Race Theory and the Afrocentric construction Black masculinity both explore the racialized

experiences of Black men. However, missing from the Afrocentric constructions of Black masculinity is an exploration of the intersections of Black masculinity (hooks, 2004). That is, Afrocentric Black masculinity upholds essentialist constructions of Black men, thus ignoring the diversity that exists among them (hooks, 2004; Lynn, 2006a, b). Critical Race Theory highlights the intersectionality of Black men (and women) (Crenshaw, 1988; Howard, 2014,); thus, exploring the experiences of Black men at the intersections of race, gender, class, and other forms of subordination (Howard, 2014). There is a growing body of research literature that is specific to the exploration of Black masculinity from a Critical Race Theoretical perspective. That is, scholars who engage in research on Black masculinity highlight its intersections and challenge the stereotypical and deficit assumptions of Black masculinity by problematizing institutional and structural notions of White Supremacy that negatively shape the lives of Black men and boys in schools and society writ large (Alexander, 2010; Howard, 2014). I turn to the convergences and divergences of culturally relevant pedagogy and Critical Race Theory.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Critical Race Theory.** While both culturally relevant pedagogy and Critical Race Theory converge as they are both scholastic legacies of Gloria Ladson-Billings, are oppositional frameworks or those that challenged the White Supremacist nature of schooling and school curricula, and are both grounded in Afrocentric traditions (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), they also diverge on some points (or perhaps on degree of emphasis). Culturally relevant pedagogy embraces the culture of Black people (although race is a component of the critical consciousness component of CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 2009); whereas, Critical Race Theory positions race at the center of the individual and collective experiences of



Black and other people of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Moreover, Critical Race Theory has a robust research/analytic methodology, which is a missing component in culturally relevant pedagogy. Although culturally relevant pedagogy is a pedagogical method, there is a pedagogical method (i.e., critical race pedagogy) that contains a robust research/analytic methodology. Scholars, who explore critical race pedagogy in K-12 classrooms, employ critical race methodologies to do so (Lynn & Jennings, 2009; Johnson, 2014). In other words, while culturally relevant pedagogy and Critical Race Theory are both oppositional in nature, Critical Race Theory allows for oppositional research methodologies that challenge White supremacy and traditional means of conducting research. Culturally relevant pedagogy is not inclusive of such methodology. Thus, while educational scholars who engage in culturally relevant pedagogical research as they explore counterhegemonic practices around teaching and learning, they often depend on hegemonic, traditional qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to do so. Critical Race Theory provides a counter-storytelling methodology that is intentional in uplifting the voices of Black and other people of color as they challenge issues of race and racism (and other forms of oppression including gender, class, and sexuality) in society. To that end, such methodology is essential to theorizing the identities and pedagogies of Black male teachers (Lynn & Jennings, 2009). Similarly, it provides Black family members opportunities to challenge issues of race and racism in the schooling and societal experiences of their Black sons (Reynolds, 2010).

## Summary

In summary, I attempted to demonstrate ways Black masculinity, Fictive Kinship, Culturally relevant pedagogy, and Critical race theory, diverge, and/or converge and diverge. To that end, when Black male teachers are fictive kin to Black male students, enact culturally relevant pedagogies, and understand how their lives, experiences, expectations, and the lives of Black male students are critically ‘raced and gendered’ in schools and society, they are more likely able to influence the academic achievement and social outcomes of Black male students. Similarly, when Black family members understand the critical race schooling and societal conditions/experiences of their Black sons, they are likely to see the benefits of having Black male teachers in (kindergarten) classrooms to uplift or work with Black boys to better their academic and social outcomes (Hopkins, 1997; Reynolds, 2010). Therefore, there is a need for a theoretical conception that accounts collectively for Black masculinity, Fictive kinship, Culturally relevant pedagogy, and Critical Race Theory to examine the identities and pedagogical performance styles of Black male teachers. However, considering that these frameworks work in tandem with each other in this study, exempting any one of them could affect the conceptualization of this study. For example, because the Afrocentric construction of Black masculinity shapes the conception of fictive kin, it will help educators to understand how culturally relevant Black male teachers who are fictive kin positively influence the academic outcomes of Black male students. With such theoretical considerations in mind, I propose the multidimensional framework shown in the illustration that began this chapter.

## **CHAPTER THREE:**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **Overview**

This review of related literature is divided into three broad sections. It is a blending of anthropological, educational, sociological, and philosophical literature reviewing the following topics: (1) an examination of the troubling school experiences of Black male students in K-12 schools; (2) an examination of the historical construction of the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers; and (3) a review of scholarship on role modeling, intersectionality, and Black masculinity. Below I provide a brief overview of each section.

The first section of this review of literature provides an overview of the historical and current status of Black male students in K-12 schools. Given the nature and focus of this research study, this examination of the literature specifically focuses on the educational scholarship regarding the troubling school experiences of Black male students in early childhood education. An overview of the extant literature also suggests that the collective, ‘dismal’ K-12 educational experiences of Black boys have led to numerous responses and solutions in terms of Black male teacher recruitment programs including *Call Me Mister* and Obama’s recent *Black Men Teachers to the Blackboard* teacher recruitment program.

The second section of this review examines the literature regarding the contemporary and historical construction of the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers. That is, whereas decades ago Black men were primarily viewed as problems in terms of social issues such as unemployment, incarceration, and violence, they are now viewed as the solutions for Black male students—at least in some educational circles (Brown, 2012; Jackson, Boutte & Wilson, 2013). Specifically, Black men teachers were and are stereotypically constructed as Black superman and their experiences, identities, pedagogies, and expectations were and are predetermined before they enter classrooms. Therefore, they have been and are positioned to ‘save’ Black male students from their troubling school experiences (Brown, 2012; Pabon, 2014). In other words, Black men teachers are expected to fix Black males, because they are stereotypically considered ‘broken’. However, an overview of extant Black education scholarship suggests that the identities and pedagogical styles of Black men teachers were not historically constructed to ‘save’ Black boys from their dismal experiences in K-12. Instead, those identities and pedagogical styles were constructed to empower and uplift Black males and people educationally and socially in a White-dominant, racist society that marginalized them and insisted on their marginalization during significant periods in Black history including the enslavement of African people and segregated Black education in the South. Further exploration of Black education scholarship contends that the identities and pedagogical styles of Black men teachers, like Black teachers in general, were destroyed, halted, and interrupted during school integration. More pointedly, Black men teachers were unable to provide support to and teach Black boys (and girls) in desegregated schools in similar ways they did in segregated Black

schools in the South. Moreover, recent Black education scholarship, namely studies on culturally relevant pedagogy, describes how Black men (and women) teachers reconstruct their identities and pedagogical styles as a way to work against dominant constructions of them as pedagogues and to better support Black children in public school classrooms. In other words, contemporary Black education scholarship acknowledges Black men (and women) teachers who theorize and/or re-theorize their own identities and pedagogical styles and ways they uplift and empower Black children, in some cases Black boys in K-12 classrooms.

The final section concludes with an examination of the literature notably on role modeling, intersectionality, Black masculinity, and fictive kinship networks. In this section, a review of research studies indicates that Black masculinity has historically shaped the varying expectations between Black and White men in terms of serving as role models for children. Black masculinity also establishes the need for, contributes to the complexity of the role of, and set in place the reductionist and essentialist views of Black male teachers in public K-12 schools as role models. However, a growing body of scholarship on Black male teachers, which addresses the intersectionality of Black males, in particular, challenges those dominant assumptions and narratives by problematizing the reductionist and essentialist constructions of Black male teachers. In conclusion, an exploration of the research literature on fictive kinship networks portrays some Black male (and female) teachers as Role Models who played significant roles in the positive academic, social, economic, and emotional development of Black males (and females).

## **The Troubling School Experiences of Black Male Students in K-12 Schools**

For more than three decades, educational scholars, politicians, media and the popular press have been and are still concerned with the troubling school experiences of Black males in public K-12 schools (Howard, 2014). In other words, Black males and their plight in U.S. schools have been the topic of educational conversations for a sustained period of time. With the inception of many school reform efforts including *A Nation At Risk*, *No Child Left Behind* and its reauthorization, it is a reality that the academic and social outcomes of Black males remain a challenge and are not at parity with their White (and Black female) counterparts (Harper & Davis, 2012; Howard, Flenbaugh & Terry, 2012; Howard & Reynolds, 2013; Howard, 2014). Black males are still stereotypically viewed as “at-risk,” “endangered,” “unteachable,” and “troubled” in public K-12 schools (Brown, Dancy & Davis, 2013; Dancy, 2014; Hopkins, 1997; Howard, Flenbaugh & Terry, 2012; Howard & Reynolds, 2013; Noguera 2001, 2003; Polite & Davis, 1999; Toldson & Lewis, 2012; Toldson, 2008; Washington, 2015). These descriptors have basically defined and essentialized the experiences of Black males in schools in such a way that these one-dimensional, deficit viewpoints of Black male students dominate the academic literature (Howard, 2014). Noguera (2008) and Dancy (2015) contend that Black males are the most academically and socially disenfranchised and marginalized in public K-12 schools, and such disenfranchisement and marginalization are reflected in all categories of academic achievement. Even Black male students from middle-class backgrounds are not exempted from academic and social woes (Howard, 2014). Scholars (Howard, 2014; Howard, Flenbaugh & Terry, 2012; Howard & Reynolds, 2013; Milner, 2015; Reynold, 2010) suggest that the schooling

experience of Black males, like Black children in general, from middle-class backgrounds is not much different than the schooling experiences of Black boys from more impoverished backgrounds. In other words, for Black boys like Black children general, social class status is not enough to save them from the clutches of factors including race and racism that permeate their schooling experience. Ferguson, Ludwig, and Rich's (2001) case study on the Black-White middle class achievement gap suggested that Black males and females from middle-class backgrounds still underperform in public K-12 schools in comparison to their White middle-class counterparts. In the study where these scholars explored middle-class Black and White middle and high school student achievement in a middle and high school in Shaker Heights community (a racially-mixed suburb on the east side of Cleveland, Ohio), they engaged in a focal examination of students' grade point averages (GPA) over the course of one academic semester (Spring 1999). Using a multiple regression analysis, they found six important key points. First, Ferguson et al. discovered that an explanation for the GPA gaps between Black and White middle and high school students "implicate skills, much more than effort, as the main reasons for the GPA gap" (p. 348). Second, they determined that while Black students reported spending more time doing homework, they completed it less often in comparison to their White counterparts because of other school-related commitments (i.e. sports) or the homework was too difficult to complete. Third, they surmised that students' attitudes and behavior towards schools played a significant role in predicting within and between race GPA gaps. Fourth, Ferguson et al. suggested that in order to fully understand achievement gaps, it is important to understand the following: (a) academic knowledge children already possess; (b) how quickly they learn

new ideas; (c) strategies they use to help them learn and to manage learning new ideas; (d) in-school and out-of-school effort students devote to the educational process; and (e) individual differences in aforementioned areas depends on group-level characteristics, resources, and processes. Although Ferguson et al.'s work does not examine the intersections of race and gender in GPA disparities, Black middle-class females, similar to females in general, still outperform Black middle-class males in public K-12 schools (Howard, 2014). As a result, scholars (Dancy, 2014; Ferguson, 2000; Hopkins, 1997; Howard, 2014; Kirkland, 2011; Washington, 2015) argue that public K-12 schools are sites of Black (male) suffering. Sealey-Ruiz and Greene (2015) further extend such idea by suggesting that negative factors including race contribute to the educational genocide or the “killing off of any chances for equitable education” (p. 55) for Black male students.

Although many scholars have focused on and prioritized the negative school statistics on Black male students, little effort has been made to problematize the institutional and structural nature (i.e., race, racism, and classism) that have undermined and continue to negatively impact their schooling experiences (Dancy, 2014; Howard, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2011). In his most recent work entitled *Black Male(d): Peril and Promises in the Education of African American Males*, Howard (2014) recommends that a Critical Race Theoretical analysis on the schooling experiences of Black males can help educators better understand the plight of Black males in public schools. He further explains that race has been undertheorized in the examination of the educational experiences of Black males; yet, it has largely informed the schooling experiences and academic outcomes of Black male students in public schools. Comparing educational



disparities to national economic deficits and debt, Ladson-Billings (2006) contends that historical race and classism as reflected via policies and decisions have created an educational debt owed to Black males and other students of color in public K-12 schools. She further adds that the educational debt stems from the historical neglect of the academic needs and resources essential to the academic plight of Black (male) students in K-12 schools and underscores the importance of educational scholars examining what is rightfully owed to Black children to succeed in schools. More pointedly, Ladson-Billing declares:

The education debt is the foregone schooling resources that we could have (should have) been investing in primarily low income kids, which deficit leads to a variety of social problems (e.g., crime, low productivity, low wages, low labor force participation) that require on-going public investment. This required investment sucks away resources that could go to reducing the achievement gap. Without the education debt, we could narrow the achievement debt (p. 5).

Because of such education debt, many scholars (e.g., Anderson, 1988; Hilliard, 2003; Milner, 2010b; Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2015) discourage discourses relative to academic achievement gaps, which compare the overall academic achievement of Black students to their White counterparts. Anderson (1988) suggests that scholars address the historical gaps including the literacy and access to elementary and secondary gaps to better understand the schooling experience of Black students in schools. He further contends that these historical gaps are largely responsible for the academic performance outcomes of Black children in present-day K-12 schools. Hilliard (2003) acknowledges that the

performance of Black students is far below what they are capable of performing in schools; however, he further suggests that the gap between Black and White students should not be prioritized. He contends that educational scholars should see the gap as one between Black students and levels of excellence or levels at which they are capable of performing in schools (Hilliard, 2003). Following a similar line of reasoning, Milner (2010) asserts that educational scholars should move beyond academic achievement gaps and prioritize “opportunity gaps” between Black children and their White counterparts. Opportunity gaps refer to advantages White students are provided at that the expense of Black and Brown students (Milner, 2010b). These advantages include but are not limited to access to better schools, teachers, school resources, quality healthcare, and communities, to name a few (Milner, 2010b). Milner contends that while there are no academic achievement gaps, educators must acknowledge teacher quality, teacher training, effective leadership, challenging curriculum, school funding, and school counseling gaps to suggest the least. Sealey-Ruiz and Greene (2015) suggest that scholars move beyond ‘academic achievement gap’ conversations to focus on teacher preparation. They argue that because pre-service teacher candidates take cues from existing stereotypes and media representations about how to treat Black boys, they should engage in racial literacy to undo these stereotypes and negative representations to improve the academic and social outcomes of Black male students in K-12 schools. In a qualitative study in which they used visual images in the form of media to interrogate the assumptions of 56 racially-diverse pre-service teachers in two urban teacher programs in the North and the South across two different courses (*English Education for Diversity and Teachers in Film*) about Black boys in urban schools (i.e., films/movies), these

scholars, using data from classroom observations, student comments, and journals, determined that White pre-service teachers developed stereotypical assumptions about Black and Latino males in urban schools from movies including *Boyz in the Hood*, *Dangerous Minds*, *Freedom Writers*, *187*, and *Lean On Me*. According to Sealey-Ruiz and Greene, Black and Latino males were seen as creating “mayhem in urban schools and the schools they attend are out of control” (p. 63). Therefore, a focus on both troubling academic and discipline statistics relative to Black male students in K-12 schools is essential to such review of literature, while also problematizing the gaps and other institutional inequities that negatively impact Black males in public schools. While these statistics are important to note, there is no need for an overemphasis of the cold sterility of negative school statistics relative to Black boys. Like Howard (2014), scholars should focus on the promises of educating Black males as a way to encourage a paradigm shift or a more dynamic way of viewing them. A dynamic way of viewing Black males is acknowledging their potential or what they can do instead of what they cannot do in K-12 classrooms (Howard, 2014). The paradigm shifts allows for educators to see the diversity that exist among Black males that replace master narratives which suggests that Black males are in crisis and are among those who only attend low-performing, low-income, urban schools. In his most recent work, Howard (2014) explores the schooling experiences of Black males from a multitude of backgrounds and lived experiences including from middle-class, suburban areas to encourage a paradigm shift and a broader view and understanding of Black males in U.S. public schools.

**Academics and Black Males in K-12 Schools.** There are several historical themes relative to the academic ‘underperformance’ of Black males in public schools that

scholars have widely addressed in the academic literature. They include Black male students' 'underperformance' in reading, their disproportionate enrollment in special education, underrepresentation in gifted education, dismal high school dropout and graduation rates, and college attendance rates (Bristol, 2015; Bryan & Ford, 2014; Dancy, 2014; Hopkins, 1997; Howard, 2014; Toldson, 2008). Scholars (Bristol, 2015; Dancy, 2014; Hopkins, 1997) assert that Black males rank lowest in every category in public schools that could improve their livelihood outside school settings.

Reading and literacy are important subject areas that determine overall success in schools (Lesnick, Goerge, Smithgall & Gwynne, 2010). However, Black males consistently 'underperform' in these content areas (Howard, 2014; Stevenson & Ross, 2015; Tatum, 2005, 2008). The United States Department of Education (2014) indicated between 2003 and 2008, Black males scored at least 30 points lower than their White male counterparts in reading and such reading gaps continues beyond eighth grade. Howard (2014) and the U.S. Department of Education (2012) noted that in many school districts, Black males without disabilities had lower scores in reading than White males with disabilities in grades 4, 8 and 12. National assessment data in reading indicate the Black males in eighth grade read at a fourth grade level; thus, suggesting that Asian American and White boys in fourth grade read better than Black boys in eighth grade (The U. S. Department of Education, 2009).

In a nine-month ethnographic study conducted to explore the literacy skills of a group of 16 middle and high school-aged Black males in a mentoring program in Detroit, Michigan, Kirkland (2011) determined that reading scores do not necessarily reflect Black boys' inability to read. However, he asserted that they do reflect ways schools

devalue the pre-literacy and literacy skills Black boys bring to classrooms, which are often informed by “modes of black discourse as units of Black masculinity” (p. 183). For example, Kirkland found that Black males “construct identities through their language and literacy practices”(p. 188). In other words, he suggested that Black males must have “something to brag about” to engage in writing. Similarly, they must be able to engage in literacy practices including exploring sex themes as a literacy practice, and engaging in voyeurism as a pre-literacy tool. According to Kirkland, when Black males had ‘something to brag about,’ it enabled them to tap into their natural ability to tell creative stories without prescribed limitations or tell tall tales, which comes out of a historical tradition of black masculine storytelling. Kirkland further described such “discourse of braggadocio” (p. 188) as one that empowered Black male writers to engage as poets. Kirkland also determined that sex themes in the identity construction and literacy habits of Black male students were worth noting in public secondary classrooms. He suggested that sex was one topic that was most talked, read, and written about among his participants and that as they engaged in and explored such topic, Black males were able to invent and appropriate language for it in such a way that “authored a desired self, whose value was measured uniquely by the tallness of the tale” (p. 189). Furthermore, Kirkland posited that Black males engage in voyeurism as a pre-literacy skill that also should be considered in secondary classrooms. In other words, they read and wrote the world with their eyes and were motivated by objects they saw around them. Building on the importance of Black masculine identity and literacy, Stevenson and Ross (2015) explored Black masculine literacies or literacies that include Black masculine identity and pop cultural influence among two first and second grade Black males in a four-week

summer enrichment program in a small town in the Southeastern United States. Thus, examining the language and literacy behaviors of 7 to 9 year olds through a case study methodology, the author determined that young Black males in this study demonstrated two modes of Black masculine identity as literacy. That is, they found that one of the research participants (Daniel) engaged in hegemonic masculinity or a type of masculinity that asserted male authority as he engaged in a literacy circle with females; whereas another research participants (Joshua) engaged in what the authors termed an “alternative form of Black masculinity” (p. 82) or a type of masculinity that “avoided intimidating behaviors” and “ran counter to hegemonic masculinity” (p. 82). The authors also concluded that these students were also able to draw from rap and hip-hop as Black masculine literacies when they were unable to provide expected written responses to literary assignments. Similarly, the authors contended that each mode of Black masculine expression produced different levels of academic success among the Black males. In other words, the research participant (Daniel), who exhibited hegemonic masculinities as he engaged in literacy, experienced less success in the program. While both Kirkland’s and Stevenson and Ross’ work offer important empirical data regarding the literacy lives and behaviors of Black males, the language and literacy behaviors of young Black male kindergarteners and the way Black male teachers are able to shape them through their identities and pedagogical styles are still unclear in the extant academic literature.

Willis (1995), in an essay entitled *Reading the World of School Literacy: Contextualizing the Experience of A Young African-American Male*, argues that Black males must see themselves positively reflected in school literacies and that schools’

attempts to separate Black male identity from them can become problematic to the academic success of Black males in schools. She reiterates such importance:

A striking example of a teacher's unintentional disregard for the cultural history, understanding, experiences and voice of a student occurred when my oldest son struggled to meet the requirements of a national essay contest entitled, 'What it means to be an American.' One of the contest restrictions was that students should not mention the concept of race. My son thought this was unfair and impossible task to complete, since his African-American identity is synonymous with him being American. (p. 32)

To that end, because most educators do not value ways many Black males are literate and schools literacies rarely reflect Black male identity (Kirkland 2006, 2011; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009; Tatum, 2005; Willis, 1995), Black males suffer many consequences including marginalization and in some cases being disproportionately assigned to special education considering that reading scores are also widely used to determine special education placement (Ford, 2013; Kunjufu, 2005).

Ford (2013) found that Black males are disproportionately placed in special education classes in public K-12 schools. She also suggested that these numbers are becoming more disproportional because teachers, who are majority White (85 percent of whom are White), struggle in most cases to move beyond deficit perspectives relating to Black male students (Aud, Husser, Zhang, Wang, 2012, 2014; Howard, 2014). Most teachers often rely on stereotypical knowledge about Black boys, which negatively informs how they interact and teach them in classrooms (Ford, 2013; Howard, 2014). This idea creates cultural mismatch and racial divide between them and Black male

students that perpetuate subjective disciplinary actions for minor in-school infractions, which leads to special education assignment (Ford, 2013; Milner, 2010b). Therefore, special education classrooms become dumping grounds for many Black male students (Howard, 2014; Noguera 2001, 2008). The over- representation of Black male students in special education is related to their *underrepresentation* in gifted education and Advanced Placement courses (Bryan & Ford, 2014; Bryan, Johnson & Williams, in press; Ford, 2013).

Bryan and Ford (2014) and Ford (2013) highlight that Black males represent a mere 4 percent of students enrolled in gifted education programs. The underrepresentation of Black males in gifted education conveys larger problems and issues concerning gifted education identification. Clearly, programmatic definitions and practices used to determine intellectual giftedness are rarely culturally responsive; thus, negatively impacting the identification and recruitment of Black boys for gifted and AP programs (Ford, 2013). For example, most gifted programs rely heavily on single standardized test scores, cut-off scores, and teacher recommendations, without much consideration for alternative and more culturally relevant ways to determine whether students are gifted (Bryan & Ford, 2014; Ford, Moore, & Trotman Scott, 2011; Bryan, Johnson & Williams, in press). For example, since verbal ability is considered among criteria/components to determine gifted identification, Black students (Gottfredson, 2004), mainly Black males, who may be speakers of African American Language (AAL) or Black English (BE) may be rated lower on verbal sections of gifted tests, deeming them ‘not articulate enough for the gifted classroom.’ This is true considering that most (White) teachers, in general, do not value AAL, BE or any other English Language



variations (Boutte, 2015; Dillard, 1972; Kirkland, 2011; Paris, 2009; Perry & Delpit, 1998). Thus, a culturally specific model that views these linguistic variations from a dynamic instead of deficit perspective may be useful in gifted education determination (Boutte & Johnson, 2012; Hudley & Mallison, 2011; Delpit, 2006; Wheeler & Sword, 2006).

Because Black males are often denied access to rigorous educational programs including gifted education, they often drop out or are ‘pushed-out’ of schools (Dancy, 2014). Kunjufu (2008) contends that the hegemonic nature of school causes Black male students to drop out of schools as early as fourth grade, if educators do not motivate and redirect them to see the importance of education. Kunjufu (2008) explains that the fourth grade syndrome is a period where Black boys disinvest in schools and the educational process. Warren (2007) has since contested such an idea. In a study where she examined low-income Black fourth graders’ perception of academic achievement relative to student self-concept, parental support, and teachers’ attitude in two school districts in the South, Warren concluded that when Black male and female students have positive perceptions of self-concept, parental support, and teachers’ attitude, they tended to achieve academically and remained engaged in the educational process. Therefore, because Warren’s work focused exclusively on low-income fourth graders, there is a greater need to understand how Black male kindergarteners’ perception of academic achievement relative to self-concept and their Black male kindergarten teachers’ attitudes, identities, and pedagogical styles.

When Black males drop out of school, obviously they do not graduate from high school. According to The Schotts Foundation Report (2015), the national graduation rate

for Black male students was 59 percent between 2012-2013; whereas, the national graduation rate for White males during the same year was 80 percent. Therefore, graduation rates among Black males are the lowest in comparison to their White male counterparts (Orfield, Losen, Wald & Swansen, 2004; Rashid, 2009; Schott Foundation, 2012, 2015). It is problematic that the gap between Black males and their White male counterparts has only closed three percent within the last decade (Schott Foundation, 2010). In its recent report entitled, *Black Lives Matter: The Schott Foundation 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males*, data suggested that the four-year graduation rate between Black males and White males widen between 2009-2013. In 2009-2010, there was an increase from 19 to 21 percent gap in the four-year graduation rate between Black males and White male students.

To that end, few scholars have connected dropout/graduation rates to the disproportional incarceration and college attendance rates among Black males. In a quantitative report entitled, *The Consequences of Dropping Out of High School: Joblessness and Jailing for High School Dropouts and the High Cost for Taxpayers*, conducted using 2006-2008 national economic and employability data among youth aged 16-24, Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin and Palma (2009) suggested that in 2006, 23 percent of Black men between the ages of 16-24 were highly likely to be incarcerated as a result of dropping out of school in comparison to their White male counterparts, 6 percent of whom were more likely to be incarcerated. This report further explored the employment consequences of not graduating high school. Most Black males who drop out of high school are least likely to hold full-time jobs (Sum et al., 2009). Howard (2014) posits that twenty years ago, such were not the case finding that 90 percent of high

school dropouts were able to find regular work. Anyon (2005) suggests that a mere one-half of high school dropouts are able to find full-time jobs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

According to Educational Testing Services (2014), approximately 37 percent of Black males attended colleges between 2012-2014, despite copious educational data that suggest that Black males outscored females on every college admission exams including SAT and ACT (Akua, 2013). In light of ‘disproportional’ incarceration and college attendance rates, The Justice Policy Institute (2002) contends that more Black males are in prison instead of college and universities. In its report titled, *Cellblocks or Classrooms: The Funding of Higher Education and Corrections and Its Impact on African American Men*, the Justice Policy Institute (2002) specifically suggests that nearly a third more Black men are in prison cells than in college classrooms. However, Toldson (2011) posits that there is a myth regarding the absence of Black men on college campuses and their overrepresentation in prison. Instead, drawing on quantitative data from the National Center of Education Statistics (2001, 2013) and The Justice Policy Institute (2002), he suggests that there are more than 1.4 million Black males who attend colleges and universities (Toldson, 2011). He further adds that there are 840,000 Black men in prison. Therefore, Black men are more prone to pursue higher education than to be incarcerated.

**Discipline and Black Males in K-12 Schools.** In light of the academic issues Black males face in public schools due, in part, to institutional and structural inequities, scholars (Canton, 2012; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Henfield, Owens, & Moore, 2008; Howard, 2014; Noguera, 2003, 2008; Schott Foundation, 2010) have also explored the inequitable disciplinary (mis)treatment of Black boys in schools. Black boys make up 5-

7% of the public school population (Dancy, 2014; Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2015; West-Olantunji, Baker, & Brooks, 2006); however, they represent 32 percent of those who are suspended from schools, and similarly, 30 percent of Black males are expelled from public schools each year (Schott Foundation Report, 2010; Sealey-Ruiz, 2015). Although these statistics are glaring, scholars (Bryan & Ford, 2014; Elias, 2013) suggest that these data do not represent disproportional numbers of Black male students who are repeatedly suspended from schools. Educational researchers have theorized why Black males seemingly are the targets for inequitable school discipline. Ladson-Billings (2011) suggests that Black males, instead of being viewed as children, are often seen as men as early as pre-school in schools and society; thus, such adultification of Black male children produce adult-like consequences in school discipline. She further contends:

The paradox of Black boys' experiences in school and society is that mainstream perceptions of them vacillate between making them babies and making them men. When they are somewhere between the ages of three and six years they are acknowledged as cute but rarely intellectually capable... The notion of little Black boys as cute does not last long. Before long they are moved to a category that resembles criminals. Their childhood evaporates before they are eight or nine-years-old when teachers and other school officials begin to think of them as 'men.' The fear and control previously referenced appears to be activated and the once cute boys become problematic 'men.' (p. 10).

Ladson-Billings noted that while schools and other societal institutions should respect and protect the innocence of all children irrespective of their racial or ethnic background, such, unfortunately is not the case for Black boys.

Ferguson (2000) also suggests that schools play a role in the adultification of Black males because Black male students are viewed as naturally naughty and willfully bad before they enter school doors. In her analysis entitled *Bad Boys: Public Schools and The Making of Black Masculinity*, Ferguson examined the schooling experiences of a group of 11 and 12-year old preadolescent Black male students who were labeled “bound for jail” in an urban elementary school context. Over the course of three years, she found that expectations for Black males in schools were similar to those for Black men. That is, they were given harsher punishments for innocent infractions (Ferguson, 2000). However, through qualitative interviews with students, and school officials including teachers, principals, and truant officers, the Black male preadolescents were able to challenge, critically examine, and make meaning of those adult expectations given to them. Ferguson also found that school officials drew from deficit notions about Black boys (i.e., the criminally inclined Black boy) to inform their interactions and practices with them in schools. Following a similar line of research inquiry, Anderson (2015) examined teacher interactions and practices with a group of five pre-adolescent Black males in a rural elementary school in the South finding that these Black boys disengaged from school as a result of negative teacher interactions and practices including the overuse of detention and out-of-school suspension in their school. While both studies explored the voices and schooling experiences of preadolescent Black male students, those of Black male kindergarteners were underexplored in these studies; thus leaving gaps in the literature about teachers’ identities, expectations for, and interactions with Black male students in kindergarten classrooms.

When Black boys are constructed as naturally naughty and disciplinary problems, White male students are seen as naturally innocent (Anderson, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Milner, 2006, 2007). Thus, zero tolerance policies have been used to punish Black boys more harshly than their White male counterparts (Canton, 2012). Historically grounded in federal drug policies, zero tolerance policies were established to curb in-school violence to protect school personnel and students from school shootings committed mostly by White males. However, Black males are most affected under such policies (Canton, 2012; Fenning & Rose, 2007). Using a Critical Race Theoretical framework and counterstorytelling, Canton (2012) examined over a period of 9 months the educational experiences and outcomes of 10 Black males who dropped out of 3 different urban high schools. She found that school security measures created unhealthy school environments, positive teacher-student relationships were needed to produce academic success, and exclusionary disciplinary actions contributed to Black males students falling further behind academically.

Similarly, Ford (2014) adds that Black males are also disproportionately placed in special education classes because many teachers view them as disciplinary problems. Combining excessive assignment to special education with the excessive suspension and expulsion rates through zero tolerance policies is the start of what many scholars refer to as the school-to-prison pipeline (Bryan et al., in press; Ford, 2013; Howard, 2008, 2014; Losen, 2013; Noguera, 2003; Wald & Losen, 2003). The school-to-prison pipeline is the systemic and systematic funneling of students, mainly Black and Latino/a, out of public K-12 schools into the criminal justice system (Alexander, 2010; Bryan et al., in press; Bryan, Johnson & Williams, in press; Elias, 2013). For Black males, the school-to-prison

pipeline becomes the start of the “New Jim Crow” or the mass incarceration of Black males in the criminal justice system (Alexander, 2010). In her systemic critique of America’s criminal justice system, Alexander (2010) argues that mass incarceration is “a system that locks people not only behind actual bars in actual prisons, but also behind virtual bars and virtual walls- walls that are invisible to the naked eye but function nearly as effectively as Jim Crow laws once did at locking people of color into a permanent second-class citizenship” (p. 12). However, mass incarceration is not only the act of arresting people of color disproportionately, but also includes laws and policies that keep in place such disenfranchising systems that negatively impact the lives of labeled criminals of color (Alexander, 2010). These laws and policies render labeled criminals of color as a stigmatized underclass and keep them from voting, employment, and education (Alexander, 2010). While ‘mass incarceration’ becomes the end results of most Black males (Alexander, 2010), it takes root as early as early childhood education.

### **Discipline Issues Confronting Black Males Students in Early Childhood**

**Education.** Research studies (Gilliam, 2005; Rashid, 2009; U. S. Department of Education, 2014) contend that Black boys are more likely to be suspended from early childhood programs. A recent study conducted by the U. S. Department of Education (2014) suggests that while Black students make-up 46 percent of the pre-school population, Black boys represent 82 percent of those who are suspended from pre-school. Rashid (2009) indicates that the preschool and elementary school years are transitional periods where the view of Black boys shifts from “brilliant babies” (p. 347) to “children at risk” (p. 347); thus, establishing a preschool to prison pipeline or what The Children Defense Fund (2014) terms the “cradle to prison pipeline”. Dancy (2014) argues that they

become “men in little bodies” or they are “scripted out of their childhood” (p. 478). Therefore, for Black boys, early childhood education becomes “the incubator of low expectations and educational failure” (Rashid, 2009, p. 349). This incubator produces Black males who leave early childhood programs without essential basic skills to successfully matriculate through K-12 schools (Rashid, 2009; Riddick, 2009). In other words, while many educators spend too much time disciplining and controlling Black boys, they spend too little time developing them academically; thus, perpetuating academic perils among them in and beyond early childhood education (Ladson-Billings, 2011).

### **Academic Issues Confronting Black Male Students in Early Childhood**

**Education.** Many of the longitudinal academic issues Black male students face in public K-12 schools are rooted in their early year experiences. A national study conducted by Aratani, Wight and Cooper (2011) to explore racial gaps in the socio-emotional health, development, and educational outcomes of Black boys determined that Black boys in early childhood education scored significantly lower than their White male counterparts in three academic areas including reading, mathematics, and language skills. Although this study drew from a national data sample of the Early Childhood Longitudinal study, which included five waves of data from 11,000 children born in 2001 at ages 9 months, 24 months, 48 months, and entering kindergarten, it focused specifically on data outcomes from 800 Black boys and 2,200 White boys. It found that Black boys scored one-tenth to one-fifth of a standard deviation lower in reading than their White male counterparts. Similarly, in mathematics, Black boys scored about one-fifth of a standard deviation lower than their White male counterparts. As it relates to language skills, Black



boys scored one standard deviation lower than their White counterparts. However, this study notes that issues of race and poverty play significant roles in perpetuating academic and social disadvantages among Black boys. Riddick (2009) posits that such academic disadvantages cause young Black boys to leave kindergarten programs and enter preceding grade levels with the lowest reading and mathematics levels. While there is a growing concern relative to academic and social performance of Black boys in early childhood education (Arantani et al., 2011), few studies explore the academic and social performance of Black boys at the kindergarten-level and the roles Black male teachers play in supporting Black males academically and socially.

In regards to academic and social performance facing Black male students in K-12 schools, primary blame is often placed on the students with little considerations of other variables (Rashid, 2009). To that end, scholars fail to acknowledge the role poor quality early childhood settings, teacher beliefs, expectations, and behavior play in the academic and social demise of Black boys in early childhood education (Rashid, 2009). In other words, Black boys are assigned to preschools with often unqualified and under-qualified teachers and limited resources that hinder their academic flowering. This pattern continues throughout their K-12 experiences similar to most Black children in general (Boutte, 2015; Howard, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2011). Many teachers also have low expectations for Black boys as early as early childhood education (Kunjufu, 2013; Rashid, 2009). That is, they prioritize what Black males cannot do instead of what they can do in early childhood classrooms (Howard, 2014; Kunjufu, 2013; Rashid, 2009). Such low expectations also continue throughout their schooling PK-12 experiences; thus

leading to national responses and solutions geared to support Black males in classrooms (Kunjufu, 2013).

**Responses and Solutions to Black Males and Troubling Public K-12 School Experiences** .The widespread concern for Black males in public K-12 schools and society has led to many national Black male teacher recruitment policies and initiatives to include President Obama's recent *Black Men to the Blackboard* and Clemson University's *Call Me Mister program*. In other words, educational scholars, media, and the public press seek to recruit more Black male teachers to public school classrooms as a way to address the concerns relative to Black male students in schools. Bryan, Johnson and Williams (in press) contend that Black male teacher recruitment initiatives have occurred throughout many educational movements including *Nation At Risk* and *No Childhood Left Behind*. However, few scholars have explored the impact participants in Black male teacher recruitment initiatives have on the academic achievement of Black male students in K-12 classrooms. Although there are several Black male teacher recruitment efforts including Prince George County's Men Equipped to Nurture (MEN), Maryland's African American Males into Teaching (AAMTP), and New York City's Teachers as Leaders Program (Bristol, 2014), the focus of this review of literature is specifically on scholarship regarding *Black Men To The Black Board* and *Call Me Mister* because they serve as national initiatives and models for Black male teacher recruitment (Bristol, 2013; Jones & Jenkins, 2012)

Recently, Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, launched the *Black Men to the Blackboard* initiative to serve two purposes: (1) to improve the academic and social outcomes of Black male students in schools; and (2) to increase the number of Black

male teachers to classrooms by 5 percent, considering that Black male teachers represent less than 2 percent of the current teaching force (Au et al., 2012; Bridges, 2009; Bryan & Ford, 2014). This effort is in response to the persistent academic and social outcomes of Black males' ranking as the lowest among all racial, ethnic, and gender groups (Howard, 2014; Kunjufu, 2013). Furthermore, 75 percent of Black boys are raised by single-mothers; thus, needing father figures to help guide them (Bristol, 2014; Snyder, McLaughlin & Finders, 2005; Kunjufu, 2005, 2013). As a result, according to Arne Duncan, Black boys need Black male role models and mentors (Seymour, 2011).

Bristol (2014) posits the Black men were not always underrepresented as public school teachers. He further suggests that according to U.S. Census data, Black men represented 49 percent of the teaching population in the 1890's. Bristol (2014) and Fultz (1995) acknowledge that it was not until 1940's when the numbers of Black men teachers declined to 21 percent. The percentage of Black male teachers are becoming lower as public schools struggle to recruit and retain Black male teachers to classrooms, despite recruitment efforts (Jackson et al., 2013). Several scholars (Bryan & Ford, 2014; Toldson, 2011) provide rationales for such declining percentages of Black men teachers. Some scholars suggest that Black men, like most teachers of color, never make it out of pre-service teaching programs due to institutional barriers including national assessments PRAXIS I and II that prevent them from entering the K-12 classroom (Bryan & Ford, 2014; Bianco & Mitchell; Toldson & Lewis, 2013). Toldson (2011) suggests that when they do become teachers, most Black males leave the classroom to become administrators and are more likely to supervise White female teachers who make up most of the teaching workforce instead of teaching Black male students (Toldson, 2011). Schools

need and can benefit from Black male administrators (Toldson, 2011). That is, Black male school administrators, in many cases, bring cultural understanding to these administrative positions that can benefit Black boys. Bristol (2015) argues that while educators become intentional about recruiting Black male teachers, they should also focus on how to retain them in classrooms. In a qualitative study to determine how the organizational conditions, characteristics, and dynamics in schools influence the retention of 27 Black males teachers across 14 schools (elementary, middle, and high schools) in the Boston Public School (BPS) system, Bristol (2015) found that the number of Black men in school buildings determined their experiences in schools. Bristol identified “Loners” or Black men who are the only ones working in school settings and “Groupers” or Black men who work with a group of Black men in school settings. Bristol discovered that in comparison to “Groupers,” “Loners” were more likely to have more difficulty navigating organizational terrains; yet, they tended to stay in their respective school settings. However, “Groupers” were more likely to move to different school settings or leave the teaching profession. Considering that a small percentage of Bristol’s research participants (6 percent) taught at elementary schools, the research literature is still not clear regarding how the organizational conditions, characteristics, and dynamics in schools influence the retention of Black male kindergarten teachers.

*Call Me Mister*, a national Black male teacher recruit program, was established through Clemson University in South Carolina to “increase the pool of available teachers from a broader more diverse background” (Clemson University, 2015). Drawing from a more diverse pool of teachers, the program purports to provide mentors to some of the State’s ‘lowest-performing’ elementary schools. Student participants who partake in *Call*

*Me Mister* benefit from several initiatives within the program including tuition assistance, supportive cultural environments, and academic support to mitigate barriers that are known to keep Black males and other students of color from matriculating successfully through colleges and universities. These barriers include but are not limited to finances, culturally irresponsible college environments, and biased national teacher assessments including PRAXIS I and II (Bianco & Mitchell, 2011). Bianco and Mitchell (2011) posit that such barriers create a leaky pipeline to the K-12 classroom. However, Jones and Jenkins (2012) has demonstrated how *Call Me Mister* participants have circumvented such barriers to take on full-time teaching positions in South Carolina's 'lowest-performing' public elementary schools. In their work entitled *Call Me Mister: The Re-emergence of the African American Male Teachers in South Carolina*, Jones and Jenkins (2012) captured narratives regarding the lived collegiate and teaching experiences of former *Call Me Mister* participants who are currently full-time elementary schools teachers in South Carolina public schools. The former participants share how *Call Me Mister* was instrumental in their development as both college students and professional educators. Many of the participants felt they were better prepared to serve students in elementary school classrooms. However, what is undertheorized in Jones and Jenkins' work and from educational research studies on *Call Me Mister* is the national impact *Call Me Mister* has had on Black male teacher recruitment and retention in elementary schools. Particularly, the educational research literature on *Call Me Mister* is not clear relative to the lived and teaching experiences of and the number of Black male elementary school teachers recruited to kindergarten classrooms. Furthermore, in light of the demands for teachers to demonstrate their impact on the academic outcomes of

students, particularly students of color (Aronson & Laughter, 2015; Boutte, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010b), research studies which demonstrate ways *Call Me Mister* participants impact the academic outcomes of students are needed.

Because of program such as *Black Men to the Blackboard* and *Call Me Mister*, many individuals stereotypically perceive that Black male teachers uniquely possess the experiences, identities, and pedagogical styles essential to addressing the academic and social issues in public schools among Black male students; thus, the intentional focus to recruit them to classrooms (Brockenbrough, 2008). In the case for any teacher, Bristol (2015) argues that educators should avoid recruiting and retaining any Black male body to classroom unless they have the pedagogical skills to support Black male students in classrooms. This idea entails Black male teachers knowing how to impact the academic outcomes of Black males students in culturally and gender relevant ways in classrooms (Bristol, 2015). He further suggests that Black male teachers who are not able to produce academic outcomes could be counterproductive to improving the academic outcomes of Black male students in public K-12 schools. Like scholars who call for a paradigm shift in the way educators view Black male students (Howard, 2014), many scholars call for a paradigm shift in the way Black male teachers are perceived (Brockenbrough, 2008; Martino, 2008; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010). I further explore this idea in the section entitled Role Modeling, Intersectionality, and Black Masculinity of this review of literature. Apart of this paradigm shift also includes an examination of the historical construction of the identities and pedagogical style of Black male teachers. I explore educational, sociological, and philosophical scholarship regarding this idea in the next section.

## Historical Construction of The Identities and Pedagogical

### Styles of Black Male Teachers

Given the cold sterility of negative statistics concerning Black male students in schools and the dependence on the identities and pedagogical styles of Black to ‘save’ Black boys, Black education literature (DuBois, 1933; Siddle-Walker, 1996, 2000; Siddle-Walker & Archung, 2003; Perry et al., 2003; Watkins, 2001; Williams, 2005; Woodson, 1903) provides a counternarrative that suggests that the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers have been historically constructed to uplift Black boys and people in general instead of ‘saving’ them. Uplifting Black boys is grounded in Afrocentrism or the idea of drawing from African-centered practices (King 2005) and entails Black male teachers working *with* Black males to improve their conditions; whereas, “saving Black males” is grounded in White Supremacy and entails Black male teachers working *for* instead of *with* Black male students to improve their conditions in K-12 schools. Thus, educational scholarship (Siddle-Walker, 1996; Williams, 2005) contends that the historical construction of the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers from the slave plantations to the Civil Right Movements were used to uplift Black males and people in general.

The identities, and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers are not only rooted in the troubling school experiences of Black male students in K-12 schools, but they are also rooted in the histories of the enslavement of African people in America as well as in segregated and integrated Black education. That is, whereas majoritarian scholarship on Black male teachers have constructed the identities and pedagogical performance styles of Black men to ‘save’ Black boys from their academic and social underperformance in

K-12 schools, a plethora of historical Black educational accounts (Anderson, 1988, 1990, 2005; Brown, 2009; Butchart, 2010; Du Bois, 1933; Foster, 1997; Grant et al., 2015; King, 2005; Lynn, 2006a, b; Siddle-Walker 1997, 2000; Watkins, 2000; Williams, 2005; Woodson, 1903) document Black men whose identities and pedagogical styles were used to historically uplift and empower Black people including Black males from a racist society that placed them in the margins of social, economic, political and educational opportunities. Grant, Brown, and Brown (2016) suggest that the identities and pedagogical styles of many Black educators historically were a part of “Black intellectual thought” or the “timeless ideas, philosophies, and pedagogies that questioned, theorized, and addressed the long-standing issues of Black life (e.g., culture, experiences) in schools and society”(p. 2). The notion of “saving Black boys” is grounded in a White supremacist agenda and is a response to deficit thinking about them (Pabon, 2014). That is, those who work to ‘save’ Black people, Black boys in this case, do not view them as capable of their own uplift (Woodson, 1933). Contrastingly, “uplifting Black people” is grounded in the Afrocentric tradition where Black people are not viewed as failures or from deficit perspectives, but are seen as those who are able to define themselves, name themselves, create for themselves, and speak for themselves (DuBois, 1903; Watkins, 2001). Black male teachers have been contemporarily constructed to ‘save’ Black boys from their perpetual failure in schools without much regard for the historical and contemporary issues that complicate their roles working with Black males (Pabon, 2014).

In line with majoritarian research on Black male teachers that positions them as ‘saviors’, Lewis (2006) examines strategies used by 3 urban school districts in the South to recruit Black male teachers to classrooms. Using quantitative data from 147 first and



third-year Black male teacher participants who were employed across these 3 urban school districts, Lewis determined that family members played a significant role in these Black men's decision to become teachers. That is, 60 percent of the research participants acknowledged that family members encouraged them to become teachers. Moreover, 50 percent of the research participants also indicated that they decided to teach as a way to 'help' Black male (and female) students. Unclear in Lewis' work are reasons Black men teachers felt the need to 'help' Black students (Bristol, 2014). However, considering the nomenclature of Black male teachers to serve as role models in response to the poor academic and social outcomes of Black male and female students, this idea might be a justifiable reason for their decision (Bristol, 2014; Hopkins, 1997; Howard, 2014). Similarly, in a recent scholarship that explores the need to recruit and retain Black men teachers in gifted education, Bryan and Ford (2014) emphasize the importance of the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers to 'help' Black male gifted 'underachievers' in gifted classrooms. That is, Black men teachers in gifted education could serve to scaffold Black males from their academic underperformance in gifted education classrooms (Bryan & Ford, 2014).

Few scholars have explored Black male teachers during the enslavement of African people, segregated and desegregated schools in Black history and education to demonstrate how they uplifted Black males and other students through their identities and pedagogical styles. Whereas some accounts (Watkins, 2001; Williams, 2005) highlight the roles White missionary teachers played in 'saving' Black people through educational means, others research studies (Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1996) prioritized the works, identities, and pedagogical styles of Black women teachers in the South who uplifted

Black children. In his groundbreaking scholarship entitled *The White Architects of Black Education*, Watkins (2001) demonstrated ways White missionaries and other White people or those he refers to as the “White architects of Black education” involved themselves in the educational process of Black people. In other words, Watkins’ work provides a detailed account regarding how missionaries, major corporations, and philanthropic groups helped contributed to the educational, social, and political apartheid of Black people in America that continues to presently persist in American society. While chronicling Black people’s relentless quest for education during slavery and Reconstruction in the South, Williams’ (2005) *Self-taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* not only documents enslaved Africans who employed ingenious strategies (i.e., ‘pit schools’ or underground schools away from the master’s surveillance) to become ‘self-taught’ or to teach themselves to become literate despite prohibitive laws that forbade literacy instruction, but also foregrounded the assistance of White people. Williams acknowledges that during slavery, many White citizens including masters’ wives and children broke literacy laws to teach enslaved Black people how to read; whereas, during Reconstruction, northern White missionaries, who volunteered or were sent to the South, played significant roles in Black education. Similarly, Kelly (2012) contends that Black women teachers were also constructed as those who were most important in the schooling lives of Black children in the South. In the introduction to a special issue in *Educational Studies* titled “*Just Something Gone, but Nothing Missings*”: *Booker T. Washington, Nannie Helen Burroughs, and the Social Significance of Black Teachers Theorizing Across Two Centuries*, Kelly argues the importance of Black teachers theorizing their practices, considering that Black teachers had limited

opportunities to do so until the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the turn of the century, Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois theorized about the educational needs of Black children in schools. However, Kelley contends that such discussions between Washington and Du Bois, Black teachers emphasized the importance of access, equality, and opportunities for Black children instead of theorizing their practices. In other words, while Black education scholars/historians (Alridge, 1999 a, b; Anderson, 1988, 1990; Span, 2010; Williams, 2005) have provided historical evidence to support and/or recognized the pedagogical contributions of Black teachers during these significant periods in Black history and education, scholars who explore Black male teachers have rarely used these and other historical accounts to construct the identities, ability to support Black children, and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers and their roles in uplifting Black males instead of saving them.

Although Lynn (2006) and Brown (2011) have acknowledged the visible pedagogical identities and contributions of W.E. B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, and Carter G. Woodson and several influential and noteworthy Black women teachers including Anna Julia Cooper and Barbara Sizemore in their scholarship on Black male teachers, they have understudied Black males, their identities and pedagogical styles and how those conceptions played a role in uplifting Black people prior to colonial education<sup>8</sup> and/or Reconstruction. Specifically, like most scholars on Black male teachers, they have under-theorized the ways in which Black men as teachers on slave plantations

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<sup>8</sup> According to Watkins (2001), colonial education in America was constructed and “designed to control, pacify, and social subject people” (p. 1). Oftentimes, philanthropic groups funded colonial education to maintain the status quo to keep Black people subservient.

encouraged teaching and learning literacy and how such teaching and learning uplifted Black people from oppression.

Considering that Brown (2011) and Howard (2014) have traced the origins of the historical construction of the negative images and stereotypes of Black males from the enslavement of African people to these present times, scholarship on Black male teachers calls for a more nuanced, historical construction and view of the Black male teacher and the positive and instrumental role they have played in uplifting Black people. On one hand, Brown (2011), in his essay “*Same Old Stories: The Black Male in Social Science and Educational Literature, 1930-present*,” argues that historically deficit narratives regarding Black men have shaped contemporary beliefs about Black boys being ‘in crisis.’ Brown problematizes these ideas in order to construct and encourage “new theories, research, and interventions that account for the complex needs of Black males’ lives” (p. 2047). On the other hand, Howard (2014) documents how historical views of Black males, rooted in slavery, have been used to define contemporary views of them in schools and society writ large; thus, impacting ways teachers view them and how they view themselves. Howard contends that ultimately such constructions of Black males impact how they perform in schools. Therefore, because of the limited historical scope and narrow, reductionist and essentialist lens on Black male teachers as ‘saviors’ for Black boys and to build on contemporary scholarship on them (Brown, 2012b), there is a need to provide a counternarrative through academic scholarship to trace the origins of Black male teachers and how they uplifted Black people dating back as far as the enslavement of Africans in the U.S. Such counternarrative regarding the historical construction of the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers supports

Schomburg's (1992/1925) argument suggesting the need 'to dig up' Black history as a way to restore it. Schomburg contends that there are many historical Black contributions that need to be 'dug up' to shed light on the many valuable intellectual and cultural impressions Black people left on humanity. The historical identities and pedagogical styles of Black (male) teachers are among those cultural impressions (Brown 2009, 2012a, b; Lynn, 2006a, b; Foster, 1997).

Three scholarly explanations provide the context for the under-theorization of Black men (and women) teachers during enslavement and their (Black teachers) roles in uplifting Black people. First, many educational scholars on Black teachers, particularly Black male teachers may have overlooked the ways enslaved Black men (and women) taught and uplifted Black people on slave plantations because most of the historical literature on Black teachers dates from the Reconstruction era to the Civil Right Movement (Pabon, 2013). Second, finding archival records during certain periods is difficult since much teaching was done in secrecy and no documents were maintained (Williams, 2005). Third, educational scholars may see the pedagogical contributions of Black men and women on slave plantations as uplifting, but may not consider them as comparable to current pedagogical practices in K-12 classrooms, which are largely informed by empirical research in teacher education. Cochran-Smith and Zeichner's (2005) edited volume *Studying Teacher Education: The Report of the AERA Panel on Research and Teacher Education* focuses on the need for empirical research to inform teacher education and the quality of teacher education. Inclusive of a compilation of literature reviews on a wide range of educational topics including teacher preparation, contributing authors theorize the importance of addressing the education and preparation

of teachers in response to highly controversial and politically driven education reform policies. During slavery and Reconstruction, the education and teacher education training of enslaved and freed Black people and teachers have always been questioned as many White people perceived enslaved Blacks as uneducated and Black teachers as unqualified and underqualified for lacking formal training (Anderson, 1988). Presently, many White people still perceive Black people to be less educated than they are and Black teachers are still seen as unqualified to become and underqualified to be teachers, even those who teach in higher education (Grant, Brown & Brown, 2015; Juarez & Hayes, 2014).

In a case study, Juarez and Hayes (2014) document the higher educational teaching experiences of critical professors (a Black male and a White female) who challenge systems of inequities in their teaching and scholarship at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the West. They found that based on student and teaching evaluations, the Black male professor was perceived by both White students and collegiate administrators to be ‘incompetent,’ because he centered issues of race and racism in his teaching. He was encouraged by his departmental administrator to work closely with his White professor colleagues who could help him to ‘improve’ his teaching practices (Juarez & Hayes, 2014). Although the White professor also explicitly addressed issues of race and racism in her pedagogical practice, she was not perceived to be ‘incompetent.’ However, her White students (and colleagues) found her to be too ‘radical’ (Juarez & Hayes, 2014).

Historically, many Black teachers did not receive formal teacher training to academically support Black students until the establishment and expansion of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Anderson, 1988, 1997; Fairclough, 2007).

Enslaved Black men and women were considered lacking formal education and teacher training on slave plantations (Anderson, 1988). Therefore, concerns regarding pedagogical styles they used would be scrutinized despite making significant contributions to the lives of enslaved Black children and adults. However, the pedagogies of Black men (and women) teachers, who supported education on slave plantations, were as effective as those pedagogies presently used in K-12 classrooms, which are in most cases ineffective methodologies and strategies used to support the educational process of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Boutte, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010a, b). Because the literacy strategies on slave plantations were useful in freeing enslaved Africans who were not previously free (Anderson, 1995; DuBois, 1933; Jackson & Boutte, 2009; Perry et al., 2003; Prendergast, 2003; Williams, 2005), they should be deemed noteworthy as effective pedagogical methodologies. In other words, as a result of the teaching and learning of literacy on slave plantations, Black people were freed in their minds and bodies (Anderson, 1995; Jackson & Boutte, 2009; Perry, 2003). In her essay contribution to *Young, Gifted, and Black: Promoting High Achievement Among African American Students*, Perry (2003) outlines a theory of education for Black children, which drew from the historical power enslaved Black people used to secretly learn to read and write to liberate their minds and bodies from oppression. She argues against educators' ahistorical accounts of group differences in student achievement in light of the African American philosophy of education. The African American philosophy of education was the commitment to pursuing education in order to free oneself and other Black people from the clutches of racial oppression with the goal of leading Black people collectively towards a better future in a White dominant

society that insisted upon their degradation (Perry, 2003). Presently, in public K-12 schools, the majority of educators, Black and White, struggle to assist Black and other students from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds to meet the goals of a minimally adequate education and to uplift them in K-12 classrooms (Boutte, 2015; Milner, 2015). Yet, many teachers are still deemed highly qualified and effective without helping Black students meet minimal and long-term academic goals and standards (Bryan, Johnson, Smith, Garvin, & Broughton, in press; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Sleeter & Milner, 2011). If the goal of enacting pedagogies and pedagogical styles is to motivate, uplift, inspire, and produce pedagogical outcomes (Ladson-Billings, 2009), then the identities and effective pedagogical styles used on slave plantations to uplift Black people and produce freedom deserve closer study to provide implications for Black (and White) teachers and the education Black students in present-day K-12 schools.

Scholars (Boutte, 2015; Boutte & Johnson, 2013; Gay, 2000; Hilliard, 2003; King 1992, 2005; Woodson, 1933) propose that the education of Black people must start with the history of Black people. DuBois (1964) contends that the first educational efforts for enslaved Africans in America came from Black people themselves. Therefore, to better understand Black male teachers and their identities and pedagogical contributions used to uplift Black people, educators must start with the history of Black male teachers as they have been constructed on and beyond slave plantations. Drawing from the scholarship of John Hope Franklin (1963) and Derrick P. Alridge (2003), such a start is “uplifting the [Black] race,” and this uplift will improve “the social and education conditions of Black people” (Alridge, 2003, p. 25) by building on an already rich history in Black education.



An already rich history in Black education includes the historical identities and pedagogical styles of enslaved Black male teachers.

### **The Identities and Pedagogical Styles of Enslaved Black Male Teachers**

Although African people's historical contributions have been devalued, overshadowed, stolen, tampered with, and distorted, several historical accounts (Anderson, 1988, 1990; DuBois, 1903; Prendergast, 2003) explicate African people's desire and struggle for education in the United States. DuBois (1903) contended, "it was the ideal of 'book-learning'; the curiosity born of compulsory ignorance, to know and test the power of the cabalistic letters of the white man, the longing to know" (p. 367) that kept Black people attuned to education and freedom. Butchart (2010) notes that "Blacks understood that access to the codes of power and knowledge of the powerful were essential to freedom" (p. 35). Similarly, Perry (2003) adds that to the enslaved African, literacy was freedom. In other words, Black people self-identified as those who understood the importance of their own education towards liberation (Buchart, 2010; DuBois, 1903; Jackson & Boutte, 2009; Perry, 2003). They also knew having access to the master's language could translate into not only their individual but also the collective freedom of Black people (Butchart, 2010; Jackson & Boutte, 2009; Perry et al., 2003; Prendergast, 2003). To achieve such freedom, Black men and women knew they both had individual and collective roles to play in Black people's education and liberation (Jackson & Boutte, 2009; Williams, 2005). Here I focus specifically on scholarship that explore ways Black men were constructed as teachers and how their identities and pedagogical styles contributed to the uplift of Black people on slave plantations. While doing so, I do not minimize the ways enslaved Black women were likewise constructed

as teachers and used their identities of philosophers of education and pedagogical styles to uplift Black people. Enslaved and freed Black women have always played significant roles in the education, personal, and collective uplift of Black people (Foster, 1997; Kelly, 2012; Siddle-Walker, 1996; 2000; Williams, 2005).

Considering that Black education research have explicitly depicted the collective efforts of Black men and women as teachers on slave plantations who enacted identities and pedagogical styles to support and uplift themselves and enslaved Black adults and children (Perry et. al., 2003; Span, 2010; Williams, 2005), they have also foregrounded specific ways Black men who served as teachers enacted identities and pedagogical styles in support of the education for liberation agenda. Kelly (2012) notes that while earlier accounts in the struggle for Black education appears to be enslaved and free Black men-centered, the latter accounts are Black female-centered. Enslaved Black men were provided opportunities to move throughout and beyond slave plantations unlike Black women and children (Williams, 2005). Williams (2005) documents enslaved African men who were granted permission to run errands on behalf of their masters from one slave plantation to another slave plantation. This idea has privileged Black men in earlier accounts in Black education research.

Because enslaved African American men were freer than enslaved African American women (i.e., given opportunities and permission by slave masters to move throughout and beyond the slave plantations), they were able to acquire literacy in different ways, which enabled them to enact pedagogical styles to learn and teach for the freedom of enslaved Black women and children (Williams, 2005). Enslaved Black women and children were not afforded the same privileges of moving throughout and

beyond slave plantations because of the value in their ability to produce slave children and provide skills to continue the institution of African enslavement (Williams, 2005). Likewise, because of patriarchy, Black women were not afforded the opportunities to drive wagons to travel between plantations (Williams, 2005). Therefore, when enslaved Black men were granted freedom to run errands beyond the plantation for White masters, they often stole newspapers and exchanged food for literacy materials to learn to read so they could teach, uplift, and empower other enslaved Black people to do likewise (Perry et al., 2003; Williams, 2005). Several slave narrative accounts (Adams, 1872; Gundaker, 2007; Williams, 2005) identify specific ways Black men played the role of teachers to support and uplift the education for liberation agenda. According to Gundaker (2007), many enslaved Black fathers taught their children to read and write on slave plantations. He relays a narrative of a preacher Elder Green who shares how his father (whose name was not mentioned) was involved in his educational life on the slave plantation. Elder Green related,

My father was a good man but I didn't see much of him because he "belong (sic)" to different people. They let him come once a week to see us. I was always glad for him to come because he could read a little and he taught me all I could learn out of the Blue Book Speller (p. 1600).

Adams (1872) and Williams (2005) captured the narrative of the enslaved John Quincy Adams who eavesdropped on his White slave masters. When he heard his master and mistress read aloud, he listened attentively, took notes, and taught his parents everything he had learned. His ability to engage in such pedagogical practices helped his parents escaped from their plantation in Pennsylvania (Adams, 1872; Williams, 2005).

These brief narratives not only serve to demonstrate the role enslaved Black men played as teachers who enacted pedagogical styles to uplift Black people on plantations but also illustrate counternarratives to demonstrate the active involvement Black men historically have played in the educational lives of Black children and families on slave plantations. While many historical contemporary research studies suggest that (Black) men are neither interested in teaching careers nor involved in the lives of (Black) children (Baum, Schnake, & Freeman, 2014; Blassingame, 1979; Frazier, 1932, 1948), these historical narratives serve to counter such ideas. Some early childhood and educational scholars (Baum, Schnake & Freeman, 2014) suggest that men, across all racial and ethnic groups, are not interested in early childhood teaching positions because of factors including low salary wages despite research studies on Black men teachers that suggest otherwise (Brown, 2012a ,b; Brown & Butty, 1999; Lynn, 2006a, b). Exploring the perceptions of male and female early childhood professionals, Baum et al. (2014) surveyed a number of professionals including teachers, caregivers, early childhood principals and directors, social service employees, pre-service teachers, and early childhood faculty at both 2 and 4-year institutions over the course of 4 months. The goal of the study was to determine reasons men and women were attracted to the field of early childhood education, rewards and challenges working in early childhood education, and strength participants brought to the early childhood classrooms. While exploring specific challenges, these authors determined that although the men in the study did not perceive low wages to be a concern, many of the women participants perceived that low wages were reasons men rarely were interested in and entered the field of early childhood education. Because Baum et al. (2014) did not clearly provide details about the race of

their participants, a shortcoming of this study is the explicit inclusion of the perceptions of Black men (and women) regarding reasons they enter or do not enter the field of early childhood education. In regards to Black men teachers, Toldson and Lewis (2012) suggest that college-educated Black men presently have more professional options and are able to select from a multiplicity of more lucrative careers instead of teaching; thus deterring them from choosing teaching as a professional option. However, in Brown and Butty's (1999) initial quantitative study on 140 Black male teachers in the South, they surveyed Black men teachers in a suburban school district to determine reasons Black men selected teaching as a professional option. Using logistic regression, they found that low wages did not deter Black men from the teaching profession at any level. The research participants were attracted to the field of education to impart knowledge to Black children as a way to improve and 'help' the Black community. These researchers determined that the number of Black men teachers in public K-12 classrooms is contingent upon the number of Black men who attend college. Finally, they determined that Black men teachers are more willing to remain in the teaching profession, when they are provided appropriate mentorship and training during their pre-service and in-service teaching experience.

Problematic is the idea that many scholars fail to recognize institutional and structural barriers that keep Black men teachers out of public school classrooms including national teacher assessments PRAXIS I and II and racial and gendered microaggressions (Bianco & Mitchell, 2011; Bryan & Browder, 2013; Bryan & Ford, 2014; Bryan, Johnson & Williams, in press; Lewis, 2006; Nettles, Scanton, Steinberg, & Tyler, 2011). Examining the PRAXIS I and II passing rate differences between White

and Black pre-service teacher candidates, Nettles, Scanton, Steinberg and Tyler (2011) used a sample size of test-takers who took varying components of the three parts of the PRAXIS 1 exam including reading, writing, and mathematics from 28 randomly selected states. Test-takers took components of PRAXIS 1 between November 2005 and November 2009. Although Black and White students represented the majority of the candidates who took the exam, Black students represented 11 percent of the test-taking candidates; whereas White candidates represented 84 percent of the test-taking population. These researchers determined that there is a significant passage rate gap between Black and White test-takers. According to the results of this study, Black students had the lowest passage rate on each part of the exams in comparison to their White counterparts. Similar results were observed for Black students who attended comparable colleges and universities, and whose parents had similar educational backgrounds than their White counterparts. However, many scholars suggest that national assessments including PRAXIS I and II are culturally biased towards Blacks and other students of color; thus, negatively impacting the number of successful completers of color who enter the teaching profession (Bianco et al., 2011).

Bryan and Browder (2013) and Warren (2013) acknowledge that racial microaggressions and gendered mistreatment of Black male teachers in pre-service teacher education programs at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and in-service teaching experiences often exacerbate reasons Black males may decide not to pursue careers in teaching or remain in the profession. Using a case study methodology to explore the lived experiences of a Black male kindergarten teacher who attended a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the South, Bryan and Browder (2013) discovered that a Black male

pre-service teacher faced small racial putdowns from his college education professors who often graded him lower on assignments on which he collaborated with his White pre-service teacher colleagues. During semi-structured interviews, the Black male kindergarten teacher shared an experience where he compared his assignment to those of his White counterparts with whom he collaborated. While making comparisons between essays, he noted that his essay responses were similar to those of his White pre-service teacher colleagues. However, when his assignment was returned, he noticed that he scored significantly lower than his White female counterparts. Similarly, Bryan and Browder acknowledged that this Black male in-service kindergarten teacher faced challenges from a Black father who distrusted him as a male kindergarten teacher in a predominantly Black elementary school in the South. During a parent-teacher meeting, the Black father was in search of “Mrs. Henry” and was surprised when he discovered Mr. Henry. According to the research participant, the father questioned his ability as an early childhood teacher by asking him, “Are you sure you know what you are doing? (p. )” While Bryan and Browder’s work provide some empirical support regarding Black family perceptions of Black male kindergarten teachers, data from single case studies are not generalizable; thus more empirical data on Black family members’ perceptions of Black male kindergarten teachers are needed. Warren (2013)’s work in which he detailed his pre-service teacher education experience at a Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and in-service teaching in the Midwest also explored racial microgressions in his pre-service teaching experience. Warren proposed that White education professors and White pre-service colleagues were hostile towards him in education courses. Often, he was stereotyped as being aggressive as he attempted to participate in class and was once

removed from a project group because he scared some of his White pre-service teacher colleagues who thought he was too vocal. Warren further acknowledged challenges he faced from school administrators while working as a teacher in a public charter school. Warren noted that school administrators reassigned his courses because he was perceived to not be the 'right fit' for the population of student of Black male students with whom he worked (Warren, 2013). Bristol (2014) contends that said issues may cause Black men teachers to not be easily retained within schools.

Historical and contemporary research studies, books, and popular media (Blassingame, 1979; Frazier, 1932, 1948; Cosby & Poussaint, 2007) suggest that Black men, specifically fathers, are absent and uninvolved in the lives of their children. However, there are research studies that dispute these claims and debunk the myth of the absent Black father (CDC, 2015; Coles & Green, 2009). A recent quantitative study conducted by the Center for Disease Control (2013) suggests that Black fathers are more involved in the lives of their children than fathers from any other racial and ethnic group. Drawing from a national sample of 10,403 men aged 15-44 years in the United States between 2006-2010, the study determined that Black fathers spend more time with their children even when they are non-residential fathers or individuals who are not living in homes with their children (CDC, 2013). Similarly, the study suggested that Black fathers engaged in activities (i.e., homework help, eating meals, and dressing children) more than White fathers. However, the misrepresentation of Black fatherhood has always been a White Supremacist strategy to destroy the Black family (Burrell, 2010). In his work *Brainwashed: Challenging the Myth of Black Inferiority*, Burrell (2010) argues that White Supremacy has played its role in destroying strong Black families. He adds that



White supremacy has imposed upon the Black family a “black inferiority brand” (p. 14) that impacts the way Black people interacts and engage as families. That is, Black families become victims of what he terms the five most destructive dynamics of the Black family including “distrust and contempt, physical, verbal, and psychological abuse, infidelity, emotional distance, and mutually disabling partnerships” (p.15). In contrast to Burrell’s deficit view regarding Black families, notably his ideas of infidelity and emotional distance, the Center of Disease Control (2013) contends that Black fathers, at least, are faithful to and emotionally involved in the lives of their children.

Jones and Jenkins (2012) propose that the myth of the missing and uninvolved Black father has played a role in and become one of the primary reasons there are national demands and programs including *Call Me Mister* to recruit and retain Black male teachers to serve as social change agents/ roles models in public K-12 classrooms. Jones and Jenkins (2012) document narratives of some *Call Me Mister* pre-service teacher participants who suggest they were victims of absent, missing, and uninvolved fathers, which has encouraged them to pursue teaching careers. These *Call Me Mister* participants acknowledge that the program has helped them to overcome the impact of living without fathers; therefore, they are committed to interrupting the cycle of missing and absent fathers by serving as teachers in classrooms, particularly in *disadvantaged* communities. Buford (2014) suggests that Black male teachers have become role models by default for Black children who seemingly lack paternal guidance, particularly those in *economically disadvantaged* communities. Therefore, drawing from deficit perspectives regarding Black fathers, *Call Me Mister* program and other Black male teacher recruitment programs may position Black men teachers to serve as those who ‘save’

Black children, particularly Black boys from their ‘broken,’ ‘fatherless’ ‘culturally-deprived’ homes and communities. However, this idea does not suggest that the *Call Me Mister* program is not creating Role Models. Thus, more research studies may need to explore how Black men pre-service teacher participants in *Call Me Mister* and other teacher recruitment programs perceive their roles as role models in the lives of Black and other children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. However, to re-emphasize, considering the historical involvement of Black men as father and teachers, it is safe to assume that Black men historically have always taught and fathered on and beyond slave plantations (Williams, 2005).

During the Civil War, Black men enlisted in the military to build on their literacy skills, to uplift, and to teach other Black men soldiers how to read and write. Williams (2005) documented that Black male soldiers, who were literate, taught both freed and escaped Black male soldiers, to read and write. Literate, Black male soldiers engaged these men in pedagogical approaches including self-help, direct instruction, read aloud, and whole group instruction that had been previously successful in their own personal pursuit to gain literacy (Cox, 2013; Williams, 2005). Williams (2005) further documented that these pedagogical strategies and methodologies provided uplift and motivation to Black male soldiers who were learning to read and write. Black male soldiers who were developing literacy skills knew that if literate Black male soldiers were able to gain literacy skills, they, too, could do likewise (Williams, 2005). Williams (2005) indicated that Black men soldiers who were developing literacy skills were said to have been hovering around and to have ‘admired’ those who had already gained such skills. In other words, literate Black soldiers became Role Models for Black men who

were learning to read and write (Williams, 2005). Therefore, Black men have historically served as Role Models (those individuals who uplift Black people as they drew from dynamic perspectives about them) in the academic lives of other Black men (Foster, 1997; Lynn, 2006 a, b). Few scholars (Foster, 1997; Span, 2010; Williams, 2005) have illustrated how Black men have motivated other men to read, from the slave plantation to presently. Scant educational research have demonstrated the influence Black men, particularly Black men teachers, have had on the interest and motivation of Black men and boys to read because they are stereotypically considered individuals who do not and cannot read (Kirkland, 2011; Haddix, 2009; Tatum, 2005). I now explore Black men teachers during segregated Black education.

### **Black Male Teachers During The Era of Segregated Black Education**

Reconstruction reflected a period in Black history where millions of enslaved Blacks were newly ‘freed’ and the legal rise of segregated schools became prevalent in Black communities (Anderson, 1988; DuBois, 1903). During this era, for Black people, formal education was an important goal. They knew the limitations to their freedom and access to literacy (Anderson, 1988) In other words, they knew their limited literacy skills acquired on plantations would not be enough to grant them freedom at parity with Whites (Watkins, 2001; Williams, 2005). Watkins (2001) and Woodson (1933) acknowledged that newly freed Black men and women requested assistance from northern White missionaries/teachers to help them develop literacy skills. They further proposed that White northern missionaries were among those who sought to educate newly freed Blacks for the purposes of working in an economic system through which Black people would not overcome racial and economic oppression. More pointedly, the education most

White people provided newly freed Black people was to ensure they were and remained subservient to White people (DuBois; 1903; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Watkins, 2001). Historically and presently, public education has been and is constructed in such a way to perpetuate White superiority and Black inferiority. That is, school curricula uphold White, middle-class values and ideologies as they disregard the cultural ways of knowing and being of Black and other children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Bryan, Johnson, Smith, Garvin & Broughton, 2016; Boutte, 2015; Gay, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010a, b; Perry et al., 2003; Souto-Manning, 2013).

The assistance of White northern missionaries was designed to convert Black people to Eurocentric Christianity or a Christian religious movement that upholds and values White supremacy and images of a White God to encourage Black people to become ‘moral’ people (Watkins, 2001). Such religious conversions disregarded the plethora of spiritual practices enslaved Africans brought with them to America (Asante, 1988). James Cone (1979) contends that because of the White Supremacist view of God imposed upon Black people, Black Christians and churches should embrace Black Liberation theology or a theology that connects the suffering of Black people under a White Supremacist God to the suffering of Jesus Christ as a way to work against Black people’s national and global suffering as a result of White Supremacy.

Therefore, endorsed and supported by White people, colonial Black education was connected to a larger sociopolitical movement designed for “state politics and the labor market” (Watkins, 2001, p. 1). These state politics influenced both the labor market and Black education, because state politics ensured Black men (and women) were prepared to take on vocational jobs and subservient positions that would keep them at the

bottom of society's economic, social, political rungs (Anderson, 1988; DuBois, 1903, Perry et al., 2003; Watkins, 2001). Such subservient status became dangerous to the plight of Black people under their newly 'freed' status (Anderson, 1988; Woodson, 1933). In other words, vocational jobs would limit Black economic, social, and political progression as freed citizens (Woodson, 1933).

While many scholars acknowledge the roles White missionaries, philanthropists, and citizens, legally or illegally, played in architecting Black education (Anderson, 1988; Watkins, 2001), scholars have under-theorized the roles Black people played in educating themselves (Williams, 2005). That is, historical evidence proposes that Black people desired to establish and sustain Black-owned schools (Anderson, 1988; Williams, 2005). Particularly true is the limited attention given to the roles Black men teachers played in architecting Black education. In other words, few scholars note the identities, the ability to support Black children, and the pedagogical styles of Black men teachers used to uplift Black people during Reconstruction.

There were notable Black male scholars whose identities and pedagogical styles helped shaped Black education. Among those were W. E .B. Du Bois, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and Carter G. Woodson, most of whom had contesting identities and pedagogical philosophies which informed Black education (Anderson, 1990; DuBois, 1906; Washington, 1901). While I mainly discuss the philosophical and ideological contributions of these Black men educators, I do acknowledge the critical perspectives, works, scholarships, and identities, and pedagogical contributions of several Black women educators including Anna J. Cooper, Nannie H. Burroughs, Fannie Jackson Coppins, Barbara Sizemore, Mary Mcleod Bethune and other Black women who stood

alongside them and contributed in similar or even greater ways in the debates, discussion, and discourses regarding Black educational and intellectual thought (see Grant, Brown & Brown, 2015; Sizemore, 1979). As they highlighted the Black intellectual work of Carter G. Woodson and Alain Locke, Grant, Brown & Brown (2015) explore the missing traditions in Black intellectual thought of Anna J. Cooper. Anna J. Cooper was known for her educational and activist work, which challenged issues of race, gender, and class oppression (Grant et al., 2015). Similarly, although a great number of Black men contributed to these discussions and enacted identities and pedagogical styles to uplift Black education as well (see Grant, Brown & Brown, 2015; Span, 2010; Williams, 2005), I primarily highlight the pedagogical contributions of DuBois, Douglass, Washington, and Woodson. Grant et al. (2015) also highlight the intellectual work of Alain Locke. Alain Locke is known as the educational architect of the Harlem Renaissance (Grant et al., 2015). Span (2010) acknowledges the pedagogical work of George Albright, a Black male teacher during the Civil War, who was considered the first Black male teacher for formerly enslaved Black people in Mississippi. Williams (2005) also underscores the work of Elijah Marris. Elijah Marris was an influential teacher who traveled throughout the South during Reconstruction teaching Black people how to read and write (Williams, 2005). In the next section, I examine the contesting identities and pedagogical philosophies of W. E. Du Bois, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington and Carter G. Woodson.

## **The Contesting Identities and Pedagogical Philosophies of Black Male Teachers in the South**

The South became the battleground for Black education (Anderson 1988, 2005; Buchart, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Perry et al., 2003; Williams, 2005). During this battle, W. E. B. Du Bois, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and Carter G. Woodson were influential Black educators who contributed to the movement of enlightening thoughts on Black education in varying ways. Their varying contributions to Black educational discourse demonstrated that Black men are not a monolithic group (Brockenbrough, 2012b). While their thoughts and ideas were central to Black education, these Black men teachers and scholars Black people's ability to provide solutions to their own problems (Woodson, 1933). However, White people also play a role in un-doing the costly institutional and structural renderings and remnants of White supremacy and racism, which has been responsible for most Black people's educational and other problems (DuBois, 1903; Johnson, 2014; Matias, 2013).

Scholars (Brown, 2012; DuBois, 1903; Woodson, 1933) acknowledge the influence of the varying identities and pedagogical differences among these Black men teachers and scholars. To that end, some Black men educators (i.e., Washington) endorsed colonial Black education while others (Du Bois) saw its damaging nature to the uplift of Black people. Educational and sociological researchers (Brown, 2009; DuBois, 1903; Grant et al., 2015; Kelly, 2012; Washington, 1901) assert that Booker T. Washington was a strong advocate for colonial education or what he called the "hand-training" model (Grant et al., 2015) in that he pushed vocational/industrial educational programs. While Washington believed that these programs were Black self-help or they

would enable Blacks to create a strong economic base (Grant et al., 2015), these programs positioned Black men and women to serve White people in the White political economy (Watkins, 2001). Washington believed that Black people should not pursue liberal arts education like Whites because it would further exacerbate race relations between Black and White people (Grant et al., 2015). His idea of Black education supported White supremacy, racism, and racist ideologies. In other words, Washington's approach to Black education fitted within an assimilationist ideology or beliefs that privileged White expectations for Black bodies. Researchers (Williams, 2005; Watkins, 2001) also argue that his pedagogical beliefs were widely accepted by many Southern Whites who had similar ideologies regarding vocational/industrial education and the subservient status of Black men (and women) in American society. Although Washington's ideologies added thought to discourses, debates, and discussion relative to the purpose of Black education, many Black educational and sociological scholars (DuBois, 1903; Woodson, 1933) disagreed with his position, which led to debates, discussions and discourse that have lasted decades.

While Booker T. Washington embraced vocational education for Black people, W. E. B. Du Bois, Douglass, and Woodson held critical perspectives on colonial Black education (DuBois, 1903; Grant et al., 2015; Washington, 1901; Woodson, 1933). Despite their critical perspectives, many scholars have suggested that these men have been excluded from critical theoretical social thought and critical race theoretical work (Grant, Brown & Brown, 2015; Kincheloe, 2006; Rabaka, 2013), Grant et al., (2015) argue that Woodson's work on critical social thought has been understudied and relegated to the margins of philosophical thought as a result of an overemphasis on



Eurocentric critical social thought. While White men attempted to critique systems of inequities, they reified them as they relegated or excluded the works of many Black critical intellectuals (Grant et al., 2015).

Kincheloe (2006) and Rabaka (2013) consider DuBois, Douglass, and Woodson among the most influential Black male critical theorists and critical race educators during their time who directly opposed White people's and Washington's proposition for Black education (DuBois, 1903; Kincheloe, 2006; Rabaka, 2013; Woodson, 1933). These Black male scholars spoke boldly against the oppressive racial, social, political, educational, and economic nature of colonial Black education and the subservient positioning of Black people through such educational program (Douglass, 1885; DuBois, 1903; Woodson, 1933). Douglass (1845), DuBois (1903), and Woodson (1933) understood that Black men and women were being acculturated and socialized into an educational order that would ensure not only Black inferiority but also White superiority. They perceived colonial Black education no differently than African enslavement itself, and advocated the need to work against such education to gain racial, economic, political, and social parity with White people (Douglass, 1845; Du Bois, 1903; & Woodson, 1933).

Du Bois (1902) argued that Black teachers played a vital role in working against colonial education and that their main responsibility was to arm Black students with tools to agitate the racially unjust society in which they lived. Woodson (1933) proposed that literate/educated Black male and female teachers, who educated Black students and who were not critically conscious of the danger of colonial Black education were "unconsciously [contributing] to their own undoing by perpetuating the regime of the oppressor (p. 4). He further proclaimed,

With this “mis-educated Negroes” in control themselves, however, it is doubtful that the system would be very much different from what it is or that it would rapidly undergo change. The Negroes thus placed in charge would be the products of the same system and would show no more conception of the task at hand than whites who have educated them and shaped their minds as they would have them function. Negro educators of today may have more sympathy and interest in the race than the whites now exploiting Negro institutions as educators, but the former have no more vision than their competitors. Taught from books of bias, trained by Caucasians of the same prejudices or by Negroes of enslaved minds, one generation of Negro teachers after another have served for no purpose than to do what they are told to do (p. 23)

Woodson (1933) also related, “[Black people] trained under such conditions without protest become downright cowards, and in life will continue as slaves in spite of their nominal emancipation” (p. 27). Thus, Woodson (1933) encouraged Black male and female teachers to shift their consciousness and to become responsible for preparing Black children to work against the oppressive educational system that positioned Black people as inferior to White people. He firmly believed that [Black people] did not “need someone to guide them to what persons of another race [had] developed,” and also believed that “they must be taught to think and develop something for themselves” (p. 159). Perry, Steele, and Hilliard (2003) suggested that such critical identities and pedagogical styles would be important and essential to Black education to help Black children and their parents counter positional identities that render them inferior to Whites. Presently, many Black teachers lack the critical consciousness essential to help Black

students work against a society that is designed to ensure their failure (Anderson, 2015). Instead of working against such society, like most teachers, they have assimilated to White, racist ideologies (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

While the era of Reconstruction was a prosperous time for Black education and generated much debate about the purpose of Black schooling, it also became a time where Black people became even more self-reliant (Anderson, 1988; Perry, Steele, and Hilliard, 2003; Siddle-Walker, 2011; Watkins, 2001). In other words, Black people, requested access to elementary and secondary schools to which they were denied access. However, the refusal to provide access did no hinder the plight of Black education (Anderson, 1988; Lynn, 2002; Siddle-Walker, 1996). Williams (2005) explicated that in response to such a denial, Black men and women started and maintained their own schools by raising monies and charging tuition to support the education of Black children. Siddle-Walker (1996) and Williams (2005) document the widespread construction and implementation of Black schools throughout the South as a result of the collaboration among Black people. Siddle-Walker's work entitled *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South* not only documents the struggles of a small community in rural North Carolina and its efforts to secure access to public elementary and secondary schools for Black children, but also captures the collaboration and efforts of Black community members including parent, teachers, and school administrators and their support of establishing segregated Black schools. Using an ethnographic methodology, Siddle-Walker captures the voices of the community people to demonstrate such efforts. Therefore, Black people gave their personal resources to support the education of Black children (Siddle-Walker, 1996;

Williams, 2005). Burrell (2010) argues that because of White Supremacy, Black people tend to invest financially in material good/wealth that do not enhance their plight in White America. However, scholars notate that Black people also invest in education that can improve and have improved their plight in American society (Siddle-Walker, 1996). The increase in the Black middle-class has been steadily growing since mid-90s (Brown, 2012; West, 1999). Similarly, whereas many scholars explicate the divide among Black people as a result of White Supremacy, Siddle-Walker's work portrays Black people's collaborative effort to sustain Black communities through education. The role Black men and women teachers played were important to sustain such collaborative educational effort (Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1996).

Numerous Black schools produced a significant number of Black teachers who were hired to teach Black children during the construction of Black-owned and White-granted schools (Siddle-Walker, 1996; Williams, 2005). Williams (2005) notes that there were often more Black teachers in classrooms in the South than White ones. Coles (1986) notes the by 1950, more than half of working Black professionals were teachers in segregated Black schools. Williams (2005) further indicates that the growing number of qualified Black teachers posed challenges among White teachers; thus, hiring Black teacher came under much scrutiny. Most Whites thought Black teachers were unqualified and under-qualified to be teachers and advocated against their presence in classrooms (Anderson, 1988; Williams, 2005). Williams (2005) further notes that refusal to hire Black teachers generated debates about whether Black or White teachers were most qualified to teach Black children. According to Williams (2005), "proponents argued that having Black teachers would stimulate interest in education among young

Black men and women” (p. 74). Opposing Black people thought that making such demands would further exacerbate relationships between them and White people (Siddle-Walker, 1996; Williams, 2005). They also thought Black parents would refuse to send their children to schools where White teachers were present because of their historical distrust for White people (Williams, 2005). Most Black parents still distrust White teachers in public K-12 schools, which stems from that historical distrust of White people in general (Reynolds, 2010). Exploring family involvement through qualitative methodology and critical race analysis, Reynolds (2010) examined Black family involvement in a suburban middle-class school discovering that many Black family members distrust White teachers and administrators because they misunderstand their Black sons, most of whom they stereotypically perceived to be ‘lazy.’ Reynolds interviewed six Black middle-class family members whose Black sons attended a suburban middle school in the Western, United States determining that Black family members were involved in schools and the educational lives of their children in ways not valued by schools. Similarly, White school faculty frequently engaged in racial microaggressive behavior as they described the academic and social performance of their Black sons. Such racist practices prompted Black family members to have ‘candid’ conversations with their children. While Reynold’s work suggested that Black family members who attend suburban middle school often distrust White school officials, her work does not focus on Black family members in the South regarding White teachers in rural, urban, and suburban schooling contexts.

A large body of Black educational research portray Black men as administrators having positional rule over Black women in segregated Black schools (Dingus, 2006;

Kelly, 2012; Siddle-Walker, 2000); however, Black men were not only administrators, but they were also teachers in segregated Black schools, notably indicated in several accounts on Black teachers in segregated schools (Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 2001). In her groundbreaking work on Black teachers entitled *Black Teachers on Teaching*, Foster (1997) captured 20 life history interviews of teachers (20 Black females and five males) in the South who worked in public schools pre and post-desegregation. Conducted between 1988 and 1996, these life history interviews captured the lived experiences of teachers who shared their perspectives regarding the teaching profession and students during these historical times in Black education. Although Foster (1997) problematizes the underrepresentation of the voices and work of Black teachers in educational research, her work still underrepresents the voices and work of Black male teachers. Out of 20 life histories of Black teachers, 5 life histories (which is 25% of the sample population) represented the experiences of Black male teachers. Foster argues that several factors including the low numbers of males in the field of education at the time of her study (approximately 21 percent of 440,000 of Black teachers were males) and the stifling of Black teachers' entrance into the field of education through professional teaching licensure exams contributed to the underrepresentation of Black males in her work. However, proportionally, her numbers makes sense because 5 males represent a higher proportion than is represented in the teaching population at that time (21 %). In light of such consideration, similar to Foster's work, few research studies examined the voices, experiences, identities, and pedagogical styles despite the idea that Black men teacher, like Black women teachers, were more likely to work with Black children until schools were desegregated in the 1960's (Foster, 1993; Siddle-Walker 1997, 2001). Some Black

men (and women) are still more likely to work with Black children in public K-12 schools (Irving & Fenwick, 2011). The present study responds to the underrepresentation of the voices of Black men teachers in the field of education, particularly those at the early childhood education level.

Foster (1997) documents Black men teachers who played significant roles in the lives of Black children, mainly Black male students, in the same manner in which Black women teachers did. The life histories of the Black male teachers in Foster's study help educators to clearly understand the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers during segregated and integrated schooling. These Black men teachers held high expectations for Black students. Similar to Black women teachers, they were critical figures in a network of caring adults who placed Black children at the center of the educational process. Often, like Black women teachers, they taught Black students how to work against a society that had already deemed them disadvantaged (Foster, 1997). They served as academic role models for Black males and encouraged them to stay in school and to acquire a good education (Foster, 1997). In other words, Black men teachers were 'otherfathers' for Black students, particularly Black male students. In other words, they played the extended paternal role for Black male students because they understood the potential of Black male students in segregated and integrated schools (Foster, 1997; Hayes, Juarez & Escoffery-Runnels, 2014; Lynn, 2006 a,b). They also taught them to value the cultural wealth in Black communities and emphasized the need to give back to them (Foster, 1997). Foster contends that Black men taught Black children history from the Black perspective. Along with their personal experiences, these Black male teachers interwove these ideas within the traditional curriculum as a way to

uplift and build the motivation and aspirations of Black (male) students. As a part of mentoring Black males, Black male teachers also taught social skills including teaching Black boys how to tie ties (Foster, 1997). In other words, Foster showcased Black men teachers who were able to uplift and impact the academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical awareness of Black students, which aligns closely to Ladson-Billing's work on culturally relevant teachers. I will further discuss this idea in the next section of this literature review. The present study captures the works of culturally relevant Black male kindergarten teachers. By capturing Black men teachers in such a way, I provide counternarratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) to master narratives that situate Black men in response to deficit understandings regarding Black male students. Similarly, in the early childhood literature Black men teachers in early childhood education are situated in the same ways as White male early childhood teachers (Bryan & Browder, 2013). In other words, as a shortcoming in early child educational literature, many early childhood scholars amalgamate the experiences, identities, and pedagogical style of Black male early childhood teachers with those of White men teachers (Bryan & Browder, 2013).

While some accounts of Black male teachers in the academic literature (Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1996) provide images of them amid a confluence of images of Black women teachers, they mainly prioritize Black men teachers in high schools; thus, overlooking those who may have taught at the pre-school and elementary school-levels. Therefore, similar to research studies that deem Black women teachers as all that was good for Black children in the South (Kelly, 2012; Siddle-Walker, 1996, 2000), they all deem Black men teachers who work at the high school levels as all that was good for Black students, particularly Black male students. In other words, there is limited evidence



of Black male teachers working with young children in segregated Black schools and an examination of how their identities and pedagogical styles uplifted them in public schools; thus there is a the need to explore Black men working with young children. My study provides counterstories of Black men teachers who work with young children.

Fairclough (2007) contends that there has always been a miniscule number of Black men teachers in segregated schools throughout the twentieth century and that such shortage has been particularly notable at the elementary level. Martino (2008) posits that in elementary schools, a demand for male teachers, across all racial and ethnic group has always existed because of the pressure of men to re-emasculate boys as a way to work against the feminization of the elementary classroom. Martino suggests that this “culture of hegemonic masculinity produces the very polemic that contributes to the decline of male teachers entering elementary schools in the first place” (p. 190). I now explore how the identities and pedagogies of Black men teachers were destroyed, interrupted, and halted as a result of school integration in the South.

### **Destruction of the Identities and Pedagogical Styles of Black Male Teachers**

Scholarly evidence (Anderson, 1988; Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1996) details how major shifts in Black education including school integration destroyed not only thriving segregated Black schools with limited material, not human, resources, but also the identities, ability to support Black children, and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers. By destroy, I mean that Black male teachers, like Black teachers in general, were no longer able to enact identities and pedagogical styles that fully benefited or uplifted Black children (Siddle-Walker, 1996, 2000). As a result, schooling for Black children has never fully enabled them to reach Black excellence as it once did during

segregated Black education (Anderson, 1988; Siddle-Walker, 1996). Since the beginning of integration, Black children morphed from being seen as ‘promises’ to ‘problems’ (Perry et al., 2003; Siddle-Walker, 1996, 2000). Thus, although there is nothing wrong with Black children (Kunjufu, 2012), they remain among those who are most disenfranchised and neglected in public K-12 schools (Anderson, 1988; Boutte, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010b, 2015).

Scholars (Anderson, 1988; Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 2009) suggest that while many Black proponents considered *Brown vs. Board of Education (1954)* a glimmer of hope towards racial equality in the education of Black children, Blacks who opposed integration considered it ‘second-class integration’ or segregation in its most evil form for Black children and teachers (Siddle-Walker, 2009). Although many Southern states undermined the inevitability of school desegregation by postponing the implementation of integration for one and a half decades (Butchart, 2010; Siddle-Walker, 2003), the *Brown vs. Board (1954)* decision “desegregated” schools in the South. Many states used stall tactics through the creation of laws, policies, and taxes to keep intact the notion of ‘no Black allowed in White schools’ or to keep in place *Plessy vs. Ferguson (1896)* (separate but equal) (Anderson, 1988; Butchart, 2010; Siddle-Walker, 1996, 2000, 2003). The court ruling for *Plessy vs. Ferguson* declared schools and other facilities separate but equal (Siddle-Walker & Archung, 2003). Likewise, states paid monies to ensure Black and White schools remained segregated (Siddle-Walker, 1996). Siddle-Walker (2003) documents,

In 1951, the state [of Georgia] approved a new sales tax that provided the funds to equalize expenditures between black and white schools. This tax was necessary according to then Governor Herman G. Talmadge, a staunch segregationist, because the state needed as much as \$100 million in order to “equalize” black schools and, thus, to have a legal defense against its violation of the separate but equal laws that had governed the land since the 1896 Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (p. 55).

While southern states used these stall tactics to keep in place *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, southern schools presently are using tactics including academic tracking (including gifted and special education programs) to re-segregate the races or keep in place the vestiges of ‘no Black allowed’ or keep Black students out of rigorous academic programs that could give them access beyond K-12 education (Ford & King, 2014; Oates, 2005). Similarly, in most urban schools and southern schools in general, students are more segregated than they were prior to school desegregation (Kozol, 2005; Siddle-Walker, 2003b). Siddle-Walker (2003b) contends “the level of school contact between White students and African-American students is currently almost at the level it was in the early 1970s before busing solutions were utilized” (p. 26). Kozol’s (2005) work *Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America* documents a similar idea. Using narratives from parents, teachers, children, and community members in the New York Public School system, he argued that *Brown vs. Board*, did not improve the educational conditions of Black children in K-12 schools. That is, Black children remain in some of the poorest, under-resourced schools in America and have little to no contact

with their White student counterparts who often attend schools where resources are plentiful and educational conditions far advanced (Kozol, 2005; Milner, 2015).

Sizemore (1978) reflected on school integration efforts by insisting that “the child [was] no longer the center of the controversy, desegregation [was]” (p. 62-63). Bell (1983) postulates that “too many of us [Black people] embraced school integration with our hearts and ignored the pragmatic considerations that might have become apparent had we approached the whole matter with our heads” (p. 291). As cited in Dingus (2006), Ladson-Billings (2004) uses the metaphor of “dissonance” to describe *Brown*. In so doing, she asserts, Brown “landed on the wrong side of the note,” thus producing a cacophony of outcomes” (p. 212). Several scholars (Cook & Dixon, 2013; Cole, 1986; Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1996; Williams, 2005) indicate that among pragmatic considerations were the mass dismissal and demotion of Black men and women teachers and administrators from teaching and administrative positions, unequal teacher salaries, and a shift in schooling environments and pedagogies for Black children. Siddle-Walker (2003b) also notes that although desegregation laws and policies addressed “the injustice issues inherent in the availability of equitable schooling, it [did] not address the equally important need to explore the kind of experiences [Black] children [would] have in [integrated] school environments” (p. 26). As a result of these pragmatic considerations in Black education, schooling for Black children has changed drastically. Among those changes were the mass removal of Black men (and women) teachers and ways the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers’ uplift Black children.

Black male teachers were removed from teaching positions in the same manner Black women teachers were (Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1996). By 1970,

approximately 31,504 Black educators had been displaced from their teaching and administrative positions (Siddle-Walker, 2003). Black education scholars (Anderson, 1988, 2005; Buchar, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Siddle-Walker, 1996, 2000, 2003) propose that the mass dismissal of both Black men and women teachers was the largest removal of Black teachers from the teaching profession. Many scholars (Cooke & Dixon, 2013; Jeffries, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1996) posit that such a dismissal has impacted the current recruitment and retention of Black teacher to the education profession. Current teacher demographics data (Aud, Husser, Johnson, Wang & Zhang, 2012; Pabon, 2014) suggest that approximately seven percent of teachers are Black, and less than 2 percent are Black male teachers. Presently, according to Cook (2015), Black and other minoritized teachers continue to be disproportionately fired from classrooms to “make room for young, less-experienced (White) teachers” (p. 234). Recent teacher strikes in Chicago and other neoliberal initiatives or efforts to privatize public services and good are largely responsible for such firing of the nation’s least represented teachers in the field of education (Cook, 2015; Thompson, 2012). Cook and Dixon (2013) also document the displacement of Black educators in New Orleans post-Katrina amid school reforms including the expansion of charter school movements, dismantling of teacher unions, and restructuring of teacher education programs. In New Orleans, the number of Black educators decreased “from 2,759 teachers in the 2004-2005 school year to 801 in the 2006-2007 school year, a 71% decrease in Black teachers” (Cook & Dixon, 2013, p.1240). This removal of Black educators became “the largest single displacement of [Black] educators since legal school desegregation” (Cook & Dixon, 2013, p. 1241). Sleeter and Milner (2011) contend that while teacher educators continue to focus and

prioritize ways to prepare, recruit, and retain White pre-service teachers to teach and work with Black and other students of color in public school classrooms, they should seek out ways to increase the number of Black and other teachers from minoritized backgrounds through national policies to support students of color in classrooms. There is a growing number of recruitment initiatives to support Black (male) and other teachers of color (Bristol, 2013; Bianco, Leech, & Mitchell, 2011; Jones & Jenkins, 2012). *Call Me Mister* and *Black Men to the Black Board* are a few of these initiatives, specifically to recruit Black male teachers. However, Bianco, Leech and Mitchell's (2011) *Pathway to Teaching* provides Black male high school students opportunities to explore teaching as a career option in high school. In a mixed method study, using interviews and online survey data to determine reasons Black males were interested in becoming teachers, Bianco et al., (2014) found that Black male high schoolers in an urban school setting perceived many possibilities and challenges to becoming teachers. Specifically, these students suggested that the teaching profession was not well regarded in their communities. That is, they perceived that although more deserving, teachers made very low wages in comparison to more lucrative professions including sports and medicine. Similarly, they understood the benefits of Black students having teachers who are from similar backgrounds and the benefits of participating in pre-collegiate teacher recruitment programs that could positively shaped their thinking about the teaching profession. Sleeter and Milner (2011) also recommend that school districts should seek out strategies to 'grow their own teachers.' In other words, school district should develop programs where teacher assistants and other support staff members of could pursue teaching careers.

The mass dismissal of Black men and women teachers to meet school integration mandates changed the way they were able to interact pedagogically with Black children in classrooms (Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 2001; 2011). A plethora of research studies (Foster, 1997; Jeffries, 1997; Perry et al., 2003; Siddle-Walker, 2001; 2011; Siddle-Walker & Archung, 2003; Williams, 2005) confirm that pedagogically Black men (and women) teachers were no longer able to teach Black children how to circumnavigate the atrocities of anti-black racism in the same manner in which they did in segregated schools; thus, the destruction of the identities, ability to support Black children and the pedagogical styles of Black men (and women) teachers. In others words, the race-focused pedagogies and cultural-specific performance styles of Black teachers, which were used to inform and educate Black students were in most cases halted integrated schools (Jeffries, 1997). Black education research (Foster, 1997; Jeffries, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 2009) suggested that Black teachers were known to not only teach the rudiments of traditional curriculum, but also known to embed the rudiments of Black historical contributions and achievement therein. Dingus (2006) also offers that Black teachers were able to “integrate aspects of their faith in classroom practices” (p. 227). Thus, several research participants in Foster’s (1997) work explicated that Black children were not gaining knowledge to build cultural pride in integrated schools, which contributed to their lack of academic and social discipline therein. One example is Ruby Forsythe. Ruby Forsythe summarized the changes in Black students best:

When the children were integrated into White schools, the lost something.

Integration has helped in some ways, but it has hurt our Black children in some ways. Now instead of seeing black children winning prizes for their

achievements, you see them all in special education classes. This has caused them to lose their pride, self-esteem. They have been pushed back, as far as far as leadership is concerned. Instead of being taught to lead, they are being taught to follow (Siddle-Walker, 1996, p. xxxiv).

In regards to segregated Black schools, Perry et al. (2003) document that instead of being in special education Black children were winning prizes for their academic achievement. The community built the pride and self-esteem of the students. Students were taught to lead instead of follow. Because of the current conditions of schools for Black children that produced and is producing adverse conditions to what they experienced in segregated schools, Ladson-Billings (1994) recommends a culturally relevant pedagogy, which details the need for students to develop academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. I provide more details about Ladson-Billings's culturally relevant pedagogy in a later section entitled *Reconstruction of the Identities and Pedagogical Styles of Black Male Teachers* of this review of literature.

V. P. Franklin (1998) criticizes Foster's work because of its flawed methodology and overall poor presentation of her research participants' narratives. However, despite the criticism of her work (Franklin, 1998), Foster documented a few testimonials from Black male teachers who had witnessed the academic and social decline among Black students in integrated schools. These men described that they were not able to reach Black children in the way they formerly were able to do so in segregated Black schools (Foster, 1997). Specifically, Black male teachers were not able to have conversations with Black males that reminded them of their responsibilities to their communities in a racially marginalized society (Siddle-Walker, 1996). Siddle-Walker (2009) suggested



that for Black children, there were neither academic nor social benefits for being schooled with White children. Currently, Black children in urban, rural, and suburban schools are not faring at parity with their White counterparts, despite their long tradition and history of excellence in education (Boutte, 2015; Perry et al, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009; Milner, 2010). During segregation, Black students excelled in schools (Perry et al., 2003). They remained in, graduated from high schools and attended some of the most prestigious colleges and universities in the United States (Anderson, 1988; Perry et al., 2003; Siddle-Walker, 1996, 2000).

In a recent qualitative study conducted with two high school Black men teachers who worked in both segregated and integrated schools in Mississippi, Hayes et al. (2014) documented the narrative of Mr. Crenshaw who spoke of a shift in the way Black men teachers were able to identify with and teach Black male (and female) students during school desegregation. Mr. Crenshaw relates:

See, when they desegregated schools, we lost some of this ability to “educate” our kids [Black youth]. I mean really educate our kids in a way that they can make an informed decision and to learn that what White says is not always right. I can no longer tell my Black students they have to be better than their White peers... (p. 5)

Similarly, Black male teachers were the first to introduce advanced-level courses to Black children in segregated Black schools. Siddle-Walker (1997) shared the narrative of Everett Dawson who suggested that he integrated many advanced courses in his high school curriculum. He ruminates:

A lot of people say that the teaching in all-black school wasn't up to par  
But I disagree with that because I saw and experienced the good work we

Were able to do with black students. I often wonder if white folks really want black kids to be successful. I started the first advanced math class in In Chatham County; this was a Horton, the all-black segregated school. The advanced math class was a course where they got beyond geometry and algebra two. But when the county school officials found out what we were doing, they blocked the course (p. 5).

Presently, Black children are least likely to be enrolled in advanced courses in public K-12 schools (Ford, 2013). However, taking advanced courses was not the only thing destroyed for Black children. They were unable to experience the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers who were teaching advanced courses (Bryan & Ford, 2014; Hayes et al., 2014). Currently, few Black male teachers teach gifted and Advanced Placement classes (Bryan & Ford, 2014). They are rarely provided these opportunities to serve in such capacities as school administrators reserve these positions for White female teachers (Bryan & Ford, 2014). This idea occurs despite historical accounts (Foster, 1997; Hayes et. al, 2014; Siddle-Walker, 2000) that suggest that Black male teachers were among the first to create advance courses in segregated schools. This idea further explains why few Black students, particularly Black males are identified as gifted. Less than four percent of Black males are gifted and/or Advanced Placement students, despite Black males representing 7 percent of the public school populations (Bryan & Ford, 2014; Bryan et al., in press) Similar to the pipeline through which Black male matriculate to become K-12 classroom teachers (Brown & Butty, 1999; Bianco, Leech, & Mitchell, 2011; Henfield, Moore, & Woods, 2011; Lewis & Toldson, 2013), the pipeline to gifted teaching starts in the gifted classroom. However, it becomes leaky

and almost non-existent, because most Black males never make it to the gifted classroom (Bryan & Ford, 2013; Bryan et. al. in press). In the next section, I explore the reconstruction of the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers as a result of culturally relevant pedagogies.

### **Reconstruction of the Identities and Pedagogical Styles of Black Male Teachers**

*Black Male Teachers During The Culturally Relevant Pedagogical Paradigmatic Era.* Exploring mainly Black women teachers, extant scholarship on culturally relevant teachers has recently begun to highlight the culturally relevant identities and pedagogical practices of Black men teachers (see Brown, 2009; Lynn, 2006a,b). My study builds on this research on culturally relevant Black male teachers, particularly those who work in kindergarten classrooms. Therefore, through the inception of culturally relevant pedagogy, Black male teachers are able to theorize and/or re-theorize their practices and ways they uplift Black children in Pre-K-12 classrooms (Lynn, 2006a, b). Culturally relevant pedagogy is about uplifting and empowering--not 'saving' Black students (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

An initial study on culturally relevant teachers conducted by Ladson-Billings (1995) explores the culturally relevant pedagogical practices of five Black and three White public school women teachers who were selected to participate in the study through a community nomination process. Ladson-Billings surveyed educational stakeholders including parents and administrators, regarding teachers they viewed as most influential in their school and community. These teachers worked with predominantly Black children in varying schooling contexts including rural, suburban, private, and public urban schools (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009). These teachers were

able to draw from their cultural wealth of the children and communities to infuse it into traditional curricula (Ladson-Bilings, 1994, 2009). Using a storytelling methodology, Ladson-Billings share the pedagogical styles of these teachers over the course of three years and describes them as culturally relevant because they: (1) have high self-esteem and high regard for others; (2) see themselves as part of the community; (3) see teaching as giving back to the community and encourage students to do the same; (4) see teaching as an art and see themselves as artists; (5) believe that all students can succeed; (6) help students make connections between their community, national, and global identities; (7) and see themselves as digging knowledge out of students (p 55).

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) stands in opposition to traditional frameworks in public school classrooms where teachers fail to acknowledge the cultural wealth of the student they serve. In opposing traditional frameworks, CRP acknowledges the whole child and his/her community as sources of cultural information (Ladson-Billings 1994, 2009). Ladson-Billings contends:

Culturally relevant teaching fosters the kinds of social interaction in the classroom that supports the individual in the group context. Students feel a part of the collective designed to encourage academic and cultural excellence. As members of an extended family, the students assist, support, and encourage one another.

The entire group rises and falls together. Thus, it's everyone in the group's best interest to ensure that the others in the group are successful (p. 76).

What is more pedagogically promising about culturally relevant pedagogy is that while it emphasizes the academic, cultural, and social development of Black children, it prioritizes how Black students are raced, gendered, and classed (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Acknowledging these conceptions in pedagogies move beyond a colorblind approach or one where race, gender, and class are ignored. This approach helps educators understand and recognize that Black students have different ways of knowing and experiencing the world or they bring different experiential knowledge to K-12 classrooms.

However, while culturally relevant pedagogy brings oppositional attributes to the forefront in traditional K-12 classrooms that benefit Black children, there is some critique in the academic literature relative to how it may not account for the academic performance of Black male students (Brown, 2009). Unlike Foster and Peele's *effective teachers* and Murrell's *responsive teacher* models, what is rarely explored surrounding culturally relevant pedagogy are ways it influence the teaching and learning process of Black male students (Bristol, 2015; Brown, 2009). Foster and Peele's (1999) effective teachers framework underscores the important of the successful teaching of Black male students finding that teachers who are able "to build positive personal relationships with Black male students, adopt dominant yet respectful teaching styles, maintain high expectations, connect curriculum with students' personal lives, and believe students can learn and take responsibility for inspiring them to learn" (p. 13) can acquire academic success among them. Another limited focus regarding the research on culturally relevant Black male teachers is the way they impact the academic performance of Black males in specific content areas including literacy, math, science, and technology. Emdin (2011) explored culturally relevant pedagogy or what he termed "reality pedagogy" in urban science classrooms. Emdin described culturally relevant pedagogy as the "boat without the paddle," thus needing "reality pedagogy" (p. 286) as the "paddle" which provide educators practical tools to engage in culturally relevant teaching. In his three-year

ethnographic study of an urban physic and chemistry classroom in New York, he found that urban students demonstrated motivation and mastery of science content when they had opportunities to engage in co-generative dialogues, co-teaching, and cosmopolitanism. That is, when students are able to use communicative styles familiar to them, are positioned to serve as co-researchers/teachers who produce knowledge in the science classroom, and are able to establish supportive relationships with teachers and peers, they developed increased interest and achieve academically in science classrooms as reflected via test scores and class participation. Similarly, using an ethnographic methodology to explore culturally relevant teaching through Hip-Hop-Based Education (HHBE) in an urban English classroom in Philadelphia over the course of an academic year, Hill (2009) found that urban students were able to used hip-hop to engage complex literary text. Students were able to use these English texts to critique power dynamics in society and make meaning of their lived experiences in the world. Although these works may not have shown specific influence on Black male students (particularly at the kindergarten level), they provide some insight into the nexus between culturally relevant pedagogy and specific academic content areas with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. My study examined how culturally relevant Black male teachers impact Black male kindergarteners while also motivating them to achieve academically in the academic areas in literacy and mathematics. Moreover, a limited number of studies demonstrate how culturally relevant pedagogy enacts a gender-relevant pedagogy (Bristol, 2015). Culturally relevant pedagogy takes for granted the assumptions that Black boys may learn differently than Black girls (Bristol, 2015). My study demonstrate ways Black males learn differently and how culturally relevant Black men

teachers influence their learning in kindergarten classrooms. I explore the literature of culturally relevant Black male teachers in the following section.

**Exploring Culturally Relevant Black Male Teachers.** While there has been an overemphasis in education research on understanding why Black men desire to teach and the recruitment and retention of and the need for Black male teachers to serve as role models (Brown & Butty, 1999; Lewis, 2006; Martino, 2008), some scholars (Brown, 2009, 2012; Hayes et al., 2014; Lynn, 2006a; Lynn et al., 1999) have explored the pedagogies of Black male teachers in K-12 classrooms. Research studies (Adams, 1872; Foster, 1997; Gundaker, 2007; Span, 2010; Williams, 2005) on culturally relevant pedagogical practices of Black male teachers have historically always existed, despite limited attention given to it. However, I now explore more contemporary scholarship on the culturally relevant pedagogical practices of Black men teachers.

Following Ladson-Billings' work, Lynn (2006) explores the culturally relevant pedagogical practices of three Black male teachers who worked in a large urban school district in the Midwest. Using a culturally relevant teaching framework and Light-foot's (1983) portraiture methodology or a "method of blending art and science" (Lynn, 2006b, p. 2501), over a nine-month period through interviews and classroom observations, Lynn found that when Black male teachers help Black students build healthy racial identities and understand race and class oppression through culturally relevant pedagogies, they were able to inspire and motivate them to excel in K-12 classrooms. Lynn also frames these culturally relevant Black men teachers as 'other fathers' who served as role models and disciplinarians who used "tough love, discipline, and caring" (p. 2517) to guide Black males. Although Lynn's work is foundational to the research on culturally Black

male teachers and demonstrates the way they influence Black students, one of the limitations to his study is that it was conducted in the Mid-West in a middle school settings, thus minimizing ways Black male teachers in the South and teachers who are in early childhood classrooms engage in culturally relevant teaching. My study focuses on culturally relevant Black male teachers in the South and highlights their work in kindergarten classrooms.

Similarly, Brown (2009) explored the culturally relevant pedagogical practices of nine Black male teachers in two high-poverty urban middle schools in the Mid-Western United States. He found three performative styles that support Black male students in middle school classrooms: (1) enforcer; (2) negotiator; and (3) playful. According to Brown, the enforcer “seeks immediate enforcement of defined expectations” (p. 426). The negotiator uses “discussion, counsel, and questioning as a method for arriving at new solutions” (p. 430). The playful teacher uses “a carefree approach to teaching” (p. 427). Brown’s work expands the scholarship on culturally relevant Black male teachers by identifying specific performance styles that can support Black male students in K-12 classrooms. Like Lynn (2006), Brown’s work is limited in that it focuses not only on Black male teachers who work in middle school settings, but also in high poverty urban schools. The present study explores Black male kindergarten teachers who work in urban, suburban, and rural school elementary schools settings. Similarly, although Brown demonstrates the performance styles of Black male teachers, missing are the ways these styles influence Black male students in specific content areas including literacy and math. My study demonstrates ways Black male kindergarten teacher influence the motivation of Black male kindergarteners in literacy and math.



In a qualitative study of Black men teachers in Mississippi, Hayes, Juarez & Escoffery-Runnels (2014) explored the culturally relevant and social-justice oriented practices of two now retired Black men high school teachers in a rural community. These teachers had worked in both segregated and integrated high schools in the South. They were both well known by students for their culturally relevant pedagogies and influences inside and outside of classrooms that encourage Black students to be aware of the racialized world around them, to pursue education, and to engage in praxis to change their conditions. My study explores Black men teachers in the South with a particular emphasis on Black men kindergarten teachers.

Mostly demonstrated in the work on culturally relevant Black male teachers are the various ways Black male teachers enact pedagogies and philosophies in the classrooms (Brown, 2009; Lynn, 2006 a, b). Moreover, these studies demonstrate how Black male teachers positioned themselves as raced and classed individuals to better facilitate teaching and learning for Black students. Thus, such foci assist in moving beyond the expectations for and working against the images of Black male teachers who solely serve as role models in public school classroom. In the following section, I explore role modeling and Black masculinity in the extant literature.

### **Role Modeling, Intersectionality, and Black Masculinity**

Educational scholars, researchers, policy-makers and popular press have all called for men teachers in general to serve as role models in schools to support boys as concerns have been raised about the feminization of schools, the influx of female teachers who lead classrooms, and the general underperformance of boys in schools (Bristol, 2015; Brockenbrough, 2012; Carrington & McPhee, 2008; Martino, 2008, 2014; Rezai-Rashti

& Martino, 2010; Skelton, 2009). Stated pointedly, males are expected to raise the achievement of boys, as a consequence of their gender (Bristol, 2015). This is particularly true at the elementary school level (Martino, 2008). More importantly, scholars (Brockenbrough, 2012; Sumison, 1999) note that men are expected to embody hegemonic masculinities. Brockenbrough (2012) describes hegemonic masculinity as “the virile and assertive brand of masculine identity and expression that consolidates patriarchal rule in the modern west” (p. 358). Because of White male privilege and patriarchy, White, heterosexual men become targeted examples to reproduce hegemonic masculinity in classrooms; thus, they become more suitable to serve as role models for all children and youth (Brockenbrough, 2012).

Whereas White men are expected to serve as role models for all children and youth, Black men teachers are often only seen as role models for Black boys. In fact, White boys are neither perceived to need White nor Black men role models in the same ways Black boys need Black men role models (Martino, 2008). Although boys, across all racial groups underperform in schools, White boys fare better in schools in comparison to Black boys as indicated on all national assessments (Bristol, 2015; Hopkins, 1997; Dancy, 2014). Thus, Black male role models are needed to ‘save’ Black boys from their ‘cultural deprivation and ‘failure’ in school (Brown 2011, 2012). Rarely have research studies focused on ways Black male teachers are expected to serve as role models for all children and youth including White boys, but prioritize ways they should serve as role models for Black boys, as a consequence for being Black and male (Bristol, 2015; Lynn et al., 1999; Lynn, 2006a, b).

Historically, Black male teachers have always been constructed as role models for Black children, particularly Black males in extant educational research (Brown, 2012; Fashola, 2005; Foster, 1997; Hopkins, 1997; Kunjufu, 2005). Hopkins (1997) specifically notes that the increase of the number of Black male role models coupled with single gender education and an Afrocentric curriculum could serve as important reform efforts to improve the educational experiences of Black boys in schools. In his groundbreaking scholarship, *Educating Black Males: Critical Lessons in Schooling, Community, and Power*, Hopkins interviewed and observed parents, teachers, students and other educational stakeholders over the course of three years in Detroit, Michigan to determine the needs of Black boys in public K-12 schools. His works specifically purported to “address and understand the causes, processes, and difficulties in school politics, which needs to be taken into account by school people and concerned lay persons alike” (p. xii). In doing so through narratives, parents, students, and school officials articulated the importance of the Black male teacher in the lives of Black male students. That is, Black boys and parents perceived that Black males teachers in Afrocentric all male schools/academies were able to provide the essential guidance Black boys needed to be successful in schools and society writ large. Rezai-Rashti and Martino (2010) argue that these singular constructions of Black male teachers also inadvertently construct adverse messages about female teachers and how they are unable to effectively work with Black males in schools. Considering that most Black female teachers are and have been historically more willing to teach Black boys (and girls) (Irvine & Fenwick, 2011; Siddle-Walker, 1996), this idea is problematic. Other scholars (Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010; Francis & Skelton, 2001) suggest that such construction also reinforces hegemonic,

heterosexual masculinity or plays in the idea of supporting heterosexuality as normative, thus, promoting homophobic, sexism, and misogyny in schools. Often, such reductionist and essentialist ascriptions have been assigned to Black male teachers without them determining the meaning of their roles as mentors in the lives of Black children, particularly Black males (Brown, 2012).

Brown (2012) contends that Black males were not considered (by Whites) to be appropriate role models for Black male students until Black people unexpectedly rose to the Black middle class. At this point, Black males were stereotypically seen as possessing those middle-class values Black boys needed to be successful in schools and society writ large (Brown, 2012). Over the past decade, an emerging body of research literature has arisen to contest the traditional construction of Black male teachers as role models, namely the works of Brockenbrough (2008, 2010) and Rezai-Rashti and Martino (2010). These works have not only challenged beliefs regarding role models and role modeling, but also have challenged perspectives relative to Black masculinity and the ways it is performed in public K-12 schools. In a study on Black male teachers conducted from January 2007 to February 2008, Brockenbrough's (2012) *"You ain't my daddy!: Black male teachers and the politics of surrogate fatherhood"* challenged the lack of diversity regarding Blackness and maleness. Drawing from Black masculinity studies and using qualitative inquiry methods including one-on-one interviews and a focus group, Brockenbrough examined 11 Black men teachers in an urban school district to determine how they "negotiate(ed) their presumed status as father figures" (p. 358). Brockenbrough determined that these Black men teachers see Black maleness as an important identity factor in developing positive relationships with Black male students; however, they

believed that what is problematic about the construction of Black maleness is the diversity that exists therein, which most educators and students fail to acknowledge. In other words, the ways Black male teachers are expected to perform both monolithic constructions of Blackness and maleness can possibly create tensions for them in classrooms. For example, in addition to sharing challenges in his pre-service teaching experiences, Warren (2013) described his in-service teaching experiences in a middle school detailing that he was expected to be a ‘disciplinarian’ for his Black male students. However, when he was not able to live up to those expectations, he was removed from his teaching position in a public charter school in the North. Although Warren’s work is important to illuminating the traditional expectations for Black male teachers in schools and the monolithic constructions of Blackness and maleness, my study explores the expectations of Black male kindergarten in public school settings who are expected to perform likewise. Additionally, it is also important to note that understanding the consequences of Black male teachers, particularly kindergarten teachers, who do not fit within traditional expectations for Black male teachers and monolithic constructions of Blackness and maleness need further exploration in extant educational research literature (Brockenbrough, 2012).

Therefore, it is at the intersections of Blackness and maleness that Brockenbrough (2012) contends that there are “critical blindspots cast by racially essentialist constructions of Black male teachers” (p. 338). Brockenbrough further notes that what often created tensions among Black male teachers, students, and colleagues were ways Black male teachers were expected to serve as disciplinarians, which also stifled their positive relationships with Black male students. Brockenbrough’s work informs not only

the scholarship on Black male teachers as role models but also informs the work on Black masculinity. As a result, Brockenbrough encourages educational researchers on Black male teachers to employ multidimensional frameworks to conduct further studies on Black male teachers as a way to move beyond essentialist construction of them. My qualitative study on the constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers uses a multidimensional framework through which to explore them.

Moreover, Rezai- Rashti and Martino (2010) argue against the growing call for Black male teachers to serve as role models for Black children, particularly Black boys. This stance against such a call comes because role modeling is

...a flawed conceptual framework grounded in reductionist and essentialist notions of racial and gender affiliation from a discussion about the need for a greater presence and visibility of minority teachers in urban schools (p. 38).

Therefore, the authors call for the need to remove conversations relative to Black male teachers and role models from larger discussions about the underrepresentation of Black male teachers. In doing so, scholars would be forced to refocus and engage conversations that address the limitations of conversations on role modeling. Using a queer, feminist, and anti-racist framework and a qualitative case study methodology, Rezai-Rashti and Martino explored the work of Andrew, a Black elementary school teacher in Toronto, Canada. Through a two-hour semi-structured interview, Rezai-Rashti and Martino (2010) found that Andrew neither contributed his race nor gender to his ability to improve the academic outcomes of Black boys. However, Andrew believed that his ability to spend time with Black boys outside of school helps him build better relationships with them, which facilitated in-school success. Therefore, Rezai-Rashti and Martino contended that

the tendency to call upon male teachers because they are Black and male to address issues concerning Black boys in an urban school setting only leads to them being idealized as role models for Black boys. In other words, the clarion call for Black male teachers to ‘save’ Black boys makes it problematic to consider other complex skills needed to engage teaching and learning among them. Rezai-Rashti and Martino (2010) argued against the notion suggesting that because a teacher is Black and male, he would be an effective teacher. These scholars also argued that these essentialist raced and gendered constructions fail to consider how other social identities may intersect with both race and gender to inform the teaching practices of Black men teachers (Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010). Like Rezai-Rashti and Martino, my study works against essentialist constructions to highlight Black male teachers who bring multiple identities to kindergarten classrooms as they are effective working with Black male students. While few studies (Howard, 2012) elicit the perspectives of Black male students and how they respond to the identities and pedagogical styles of their Black male teachers, my study elicits the voices of Black male kindergartners regarding the identities and pedagogical styles of their Black male teachers. Likewise, the voices of Black family members are under-studied in the literature regarding the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers at all levels. My study examines and elicits the voices of Black family members relative to the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers. In the next section, I examine the research literature on fictive kinship networks.

### **Fictive Kinship Network and Black Teachers**

While there is a growing body of research on fictive kinship networks in education (Cook, 2010; Cook & Williams, 2015), few scholars (Cook, 2010) have explored Black male teachers as fictive kin. In an ethnographic study which examined the fictive kinship networks of seven Black teachers (two men and five women) in an urban school district (New Orleans Public Schools) during pre- and post- Katrina over the course of a year, Cook (2010) identified ways these educators (which were inclusive of teachers, administrators, and social workers) fostered collaboration, cooperation and solidarity to enhance the academic success of Black students. She also determined that these educators advocated for and supported the nonacademic needs of Black students, which they also found important to the academic success of Black students in schools. Cook further suggested that these teachers were instrumental in building resiliency in their Black students. However, while Cook explored the fictive kinship network of elementary and secondary Black male educators in an urban school district in the South, my study build on Cook's work to examine fictive kinship networks of Black male teachers in early childhood education, particularly those who work in urban, rural, and suburban schooling contexts.

Cook and Williams (2015) used fictive kinship network and intersectionality frameworks to explore “deeply embedded attitudes found in certain religious doctrine about the value of education for Black female and how they shaped the educational aspirations of Black females” (p. 157) in the South. Through narrative, Cook and Williams documented the research participant's (Tiffany) story written in a semester graduate level course regarding tensions between religious beliefs (which were



oftentimes against women pursuing education) and her personal desire to pursue post-secondary education. Cook and Williams (2015) asserted that the research participant found solace in a fictive kinship network of Black educated females who encouraged her to pursue post-secondary. Although the idea of religious beliefs and how they shape the educational aspirations of the research participants is not a part of this study, of particular importance is the intersecting concepts of fictive kinship networks and intersectionality as part and partial of the multidimensional frame of analysis for this study. Therefore, my study builds on Cook and William's work, which collectively explores fictive kinship and intersectionality. I examine the literature on Black male students on Black male teachers in the next section.

### **Black Male Students on (Black Male) Teachers**

Several scholars (Anderson, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Howard, 2014) have explored the voices of Black male students and families describing how teachers' identities and pedagogical practices have influenced, negatively or positively, Black males' schooling experiences. For instance, among those scholars who are speaking with Black male students is Hopkins (1997) who studied the possibilities of alternative education or the critical lesson in schooling, community, and power in the education of Black male students. Over the course of three-years, he captured the voices of two Black male elementary school students through semi-structured and unstructured interviews finding that their experiences with teachers and interactions with other students in traditional public schools were not beneficial to their achievement. In other words, public K-12 teachers were unable to provide them the necessary safety and support, and teach them in ways that honor their cultural experiences. However, these elementary school students

found solace in all-male Afrocentric schools where students came to understand who they were from an Afrocentric perspective and teachers supported them academically and socially and embraced their cultural heritage. Black male teachers were seen as playing an instrumental role in shaping the Afrocentric consciousness of these students.

Ferguson (2000) also interviewed five preadolescent Black males in an urban elementary school in the Mid-west over the course of three years regarding school discipline and their experiences in schools indicating that public schools played a vital role in the making of these ‘bad boys’ or public schools were perpetuating and upholding white middle-class values and norms through which they construct Black boys as ‘villains’ or ‘prison-bound’ when they refuse to live up to these values and norms. What is particularly important about this study is that these Black boys were able to name teachers (among whom were Black males) and school practices that contributed to their demise in schools (Ferguson, 2000). Following a similar line of qualitative research inquiry on Black male students, Anderson (2015) explored the voices of five preadolescent Black male students in a rural school community in the South through semi-interviews over a period of five months. He found that Black and White teachers were contributing to the academic and social demise of Black males through negative teacher-student interactions, excessive behavioral surveillance, and the overuse of detentions and school suspensions. Similar to Ferguson’s work, the Black boys in Anderson’s study were able to critique teacher interactions and schooling practices that contributed to their making of ‘bad boys.’ A part of his goal to create a paradigm shift in the way educators view Black male students, Howard (2014) elicited the voices and perspectives of 119 Black male ‘high-performing’ and ‘low-performing’ middle and high

school students in the West regarding their experiences in K-12 schools, opinions about learning, and perceptions of teachers and other school officials. Using focus groups and interviews over three years, Howard found that Black males determined that culturally insensitive teachers, colorblind school curriculum, and the lack of personal ownership of educational outcomes were responsible for their disengagement and perils in schools. That is, they thought teachers were unapproachable and were unable to provide them the necessary motivation to continue in schools. They perceived the curriculum to not reflect their personal lived experiences. Finally, they also took personal responsibilities for their academic failure in schools suggesting that they could study more and take school more seriously to improve their academic outcomes. However, in all studies, these scholars prioritized the voices of Black male students in upper elementary, middle, and high schools. Therefore, although there is a growing body of research literature that explores the voices of Black male students (Anderson, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Hopkins, 1997; Howard, 2014), educators rarely have accounts from Black male kindergartners about their experiences in school and perceptions of teachers and other school officials. Most of these studies were conducted in elementary school setting, yet, the voice of Black male kindergarten students were rarely heard. Similarly, Black (male) teachers were either positively or negatively contributing to the schooling experiences of Black male students. The present study explores the voices of Black male kindergartners on Black male kindergarten teachers and demonstrate ways Black male teachers engage in culturally relevant practices to support Black male students in public schools.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, considering the dismal academic and social performance outcomes of Black males in public K-12 schools, scholars have sought the experiences, identities, and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers to ‘save’ Black male students in schools. However, educational scholarship indicates that the identities and pedagogical styles of Black males have been historically used to not ‘save’ Black boys from their ‘cultural depravity’ and negative schooling experiences, but to ‘uplift’ Black people educationally from a society that forced them into societal and educational marginalization. In other words, from the slave plantation to the Civil Rights movement, Black men have always played an active role in the educational and social uplift of Black boys and Black people in general. However, school integration interrupted the ways Black male teachers were able to engage Black male students pedagogically.

Moreover, in response to historical, deficit perspectives regarding Black male students, Black male teachers have been forced into a reductionist and essentialist construction of role models for Black males; thus problematizing the intersections of Blackness and maleness for them. However, few scholars have explored Black male teachers as fictive kin who draw from dynamic perspectives regarding Black boys and their families and communities. With the inception of the culturally relevant and critical theoretical movements, Black male teachers were able to reconstruct their identities and pedagogical styles to support Black male students in classrooms. The next chapter (Chapter 4) of this dissertation outlines the methodology for this research study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **METHODOLOGY**

While Chapter Three provided an overview of the literature on Black male teachers, the purpose of Chapter Four is to explore the methodology and methods I used to investigate the constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers. I start by re-introducing the research questions for this study and providing a rationale for qualitative research. Then, I describe how I selected my research participants and provide a brief description of my research participants for this study. I also engage a discussion explaining why I selected qualitative research and the specified research methodology I selected. Finally, I explain my data collection methods, data analysis procedures, researcher's positionality, trustworthiness of the research, and the limitations of the study.

#### **Reintroduction of Research Questions**

To determine the constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers, I reintroduce the following questions that guided this study.

- 1.) How do Black male kindergarten teachers perceive, and respond to predetermined positioning of Black male teachers as social change agents (i.e., role models and/or father figures)?
- 2.) What are the constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers who influence academic achievement outcomes among Black males?

- 3.) How do Black male students perceive the identities, the ability to support their academic success, and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers?
- 4.) How do Black family members perceive the identities, the ability to support students' academic success, and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers?

### **Role of Qualitative Research**

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), “qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world...and allows the researcher to study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Thus, qualitative research was appropriate for this study because it enabled me, the participant observer/co-creator, to understand the ‘whys’ and the ‘hows’ of the phenomenon of a relatively small sample population, in this case three Black male kindergarten teachers, as the subjects of examination. For this reason, I did attempt to make broad generalizations about the ‘whys’ and ‘hows’ of all Black male kindergarten teachers; however, I had a specific goal of capturing the ‘whys’ and ‘hows’ or more pointedly, the stories relative to how three Black male teachers in the South constructed their identities and pedagogical styles in kindergarten classrooms.

Because qualitative research allows for the examination of a small sample, it provided opportunities for an in-depth exploration of the ‘whys’ and ‘hows’ of the participants or enabled the researcher to gain a thorough, in-depth understanding of those researched. Patton (2001) posits that the purpose of qualitative research is not so much about the quantity of the exploration but the quality of it.

Qualitative research fits harmoniously with culturally relevant pedagogy and critical race theory in that it enables researchers to capture the voices, stories, and narratives of research participants (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lynn & Parker, 2006); thus, many culturally relevant and critical race scholars have taken up qualitative research to explore the pedagogical practices of culturally relevant and critical race pedagogues (Cook, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2009; Milner, 2007, 2010; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Similarly, qualitative research has also been beneficial and useful in enabling critical race researchers to challenge the notion of objectivity and neutrality in research. Combating the notion of objectivity and neutrality is no new phenomenon for Black scholars who conduct and have conducted research on Black people (Aldridge, 2003). It has its roots in the Black research tradition (Aldridge, 2003). In other words, Aldridge (2003) contends that the objectivity and neutrality problem is grounded in the history of conducting research on Black people. He further asserts that like him and other Black education researchers and scholars, Du Bois (1944) confronted double consciousness in research or maintaining cultural and historical connections with the Black community, while maintaining connections to the larger mainstream research community during his era where his educational research work on Black people was viewed as ‘propaganda’ instead of research (Aldridge, 2003). Therefore, to better understand the constructed identities, and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers, qualitative research is necessary to provide counter ideas, narratives, and constructions of Black male teachers to a line of research inquiry that oftentimes have not previously explored issues of race and power (Lynn, 2006a, b). Such a lack of focus on issues of race and power has contributed to the reification of social injustices and inequities in qualitative research on Black (male) and

other teachers of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Lewis & Toldson, 2013). Qualitative research methodologies (e.g., autoethnographies, counterstories, critical ethnographies, and critical case studies) have been useful in speaking truth to power, or challenging individuals in authority and/or holding power with narratives members of the dominant cultural group typically do not want to hear as a way to work against social inequities through qualitative research. In light of all of the theories that created the multidimensional framework for the present study, critical race theory was the only theory that has a specified methodology. Therefore, I provide a rationale for the use of critical race methodology later in this chapter.

### **Participant Selection**

To select the Black male kindergarten teacher participants, I used snowball sampling. According to Patton (2001), snowball sampling is the notion of “identifying cases of interest from sampling people who know people who know what cases are information rich” (p. 243). Using snowball sampling enabled me to interview a Black male kindergarten teacher who helped me to identify other Black male kindergarten teachers who were information rich or were able to provide the information I sought relative to the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers for this study.

I also used criterion sampling. Patton (2001) contends that criterion sampling enables researchers to “review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (p. 238). The research participants were selected based on the following criteria: (1) race (Black); (2) gender (male); (3) currently full-time certified public school kindergarten teacher; (4) geographic location (Southeastern United States); (5) served as a teacher for two or more years (two years were selected to minimize the demands and



expectations (i.e. induction seminars) of induction year teachers that may hinder full participation in the study); (6) principals' recommendation to determine instructional practices and social influence on Black male students in kindergarten; and (7) demonstrated academic success with Black male students.

**Selection of Black Male Kindergarten Teachers.** All of the research participants are Black male certified kindergarten teachers located in the Southeastern United States. I conducted an interview with principals at the schools of each of the research participants to determine their academic success as defined by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994/2009) with Black children, mainly Black male kindergarteners. These interviews lasted between 15- 20 minutes in the principals' offices. I asked a series of questions relative to the pedagogical practices and outcomes of the Black male teachers. Appendix A outlines the interview questions that I used with principals. Like Lynn and Jennings (2009), I also engaged in pre-interviews with the Black male kindergarten teachers to determine and learn about their identities and orientation to culturally relevant teaching. Similar to Lynn (2001), I used a set of criteria for culturally relevant teachers as constructed by Gloria Ladson-Billings to create the pre-interview questions. Ladson-Billings (1994) identified four dimensions describing culturally relevant teachers I used in this study: (1) how teachers see themselves in relation to their students; (2) how they organize social relations in classrooms; (3) how they view learning and knowledge construction; and (4) the awareness of race and racism, sexism, and classism. Ladson-Billings (1994) strongly believed that teachers should demonstrate that they are an essential part of their students' communities. She further suggested that teachers should have a desire to leave an impact in the world through teaching and that teaching is a

reciprocal process between student and teacher. Sample pre-interview questions are provided in the Appendix D.

The three Black male teachers who participated in the study were identified in the following way. I knew one of the kindergarten teachers with whom I attended high school and worked with in a school district in the state. He connected me to three Black male kindergarten teachers in the state whom he had met at the annual state kindergarten teacher's conference over the years. Out of the three, I actually knew one of them from his participation in a previous collaborative research project and publication entitled, "Are you sure you know what you are doing?" The Lived Experiences of an African-American male Kindergarten teacher, (Bryan & Browder, 2013) that I co-authored with one of my colleagues to meet the requirements of a doctoral course assignment. I lost contact with him for about two years until he was reintroduced to me.

Using the abovementioned criteria in November 2014, three Black male teachers including the one who introduced me to others met all of the components of the criteria. The one potential research participants who was not selected did not possess culturally relevant identities and pedagogical practices in their classrooms. Similarly, his principal did not speak highly of his ability to positively impact academic outcomes of Black male students. In fact, the principal noted the he lacked abilities in managing classrooms, and interacting positively with children and parents. The principal was not confident in his ability to participate in this study. I was also concerned based on responses provided during the pre-interview process. He noted that he felt "Black parents needed to be more involved in the lives of their children so they would take school seriously." Most teachers focus on and prioritize the out-of-school experiences of Black children instead of their in-

school experiences that contribute to their academic and social demise in schools and society (Milner, 2015). Hence, such was the case for this Black male teacher.

**Selection of Black Male Students.** To select the Black male student participants, I used both convenience sampling and purposive sampling. Convenience sampling enables the researcher to select a population that is conveniently accessible to them (Maxwell, 2013). All of the Black male students were current students in each of the Black male kindergarten teacher participants' classroom. They all started the school year in August as students in each teacher's classroom. Therefore, they were all conveniently accessible to me. I chose this method not only because of the participants' accessibility but because these Black male students were able to inform me about the identities and pedagogical styles of their Black male teachers. Similarly, I developed relationships with the students throughout my observational periods of the study, which would helped them feel comfortable in sharing this information with me. Moreover, purposive sampling enables the researcher to select participants based on specified characteristics (Patton, 2001). To that end, letters were sent home to all families to request permission for each Black male and their parents' participation in the study. I purposefully selected Black male students who returned the letters and whose family members committed to participate in the study. A total of 28 letters were sent home with Black male students across all three classrooms. Out of 28 letters, 12 letters over a period of 2-weeks were returned that granted students permission to participate and indicated that a family member would do likewise.

**Selection of Black Family Members.** To select Black family members, I engaged in purposive sampling. The following characteristics were used to determine

family member participants. The family member had to have a Black male student in one of the three Black male kindergarten teacher's classrooms. The family member had to indicate his or her participation on forms to request permission to participate in the study. However, in some cases, although family members indicated that they would participate, four individuals did not show during the requested time to participate in the study. In this case, the data the four Black male students produced were still included in the study, because the Black male students participated in the study before family members had opportunities to do so.

### **Participants**

**Black Male Kindergarten Teacher Participants.** The three participants that I selected were Black male kindergarten teachers who are currently certified to teach kindergarten in the South. They are all considered highly qualified in early childhood education based on South Carolina's eligibility requirement to determine 'highly-qualified' status. They work in urban, suburban, and rural school districts in both the Midlands<sup>9</sup> and Lowcountry<sup>10</sup> areas of the state, and are between the ages of 24-35 years old. Two of the research participants attended Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) and one attended a Historically Black College (HBC) for undergraduate studies. While two of the research participants participated in undergraduate pre-service teacher education programs, one of the research participants participated in a graduate-level teacher education program. The teachers have between three to six years of teaching experience in public school settings. Two of the research participants have been teaching at the same schools for their entire professional careers. The third teacher moved to a new

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<sup>9</sup> The Midlands is the geographic location consisting of the middle part of the state.

<sup>10</sup> The Lowcountry is the geographic location consisting of coastal regions of the state.

school in his third year of teaching kindergarten, because he wanted to work closer to the community in which he currently lives. Because qualitative research requires researchers to provide thick descriptions of research participants (Patton, 2001), I provide a detailed profile of each research participant. I have also used pseudonyms to keep the names of each research participant confidential in this study. Table 4.1 also provides an overview of the research participants' profiles.

### **Participant Profiles**

#### **Mr. Javien**

Mr. Javien is a single, 5'6 ft. tall, 35-year old Black male who was born in Nassau, Bahamas, but spent most of his life in the United States (U.S.). During his childhood, he recalls traveling back and forth between the United States and the Bahamas. He felt that such experiences gave him a different outlook on life as a Black man in the U.S., and shaped early his positive racial identity and self-concept. In the Bahamas, he mentioned that he was accustomed to experiencing Black people "in charge of running the island." In fact, he mentioned that President Barack Obama is not the first Black president he experienced. When he was growing up in the Bahamas, the president was Black. Therefore, these experiences helped shaped his consciousness.

Mr. Javien is the oldest of three Black males in his immediate family. His parents are both middle-class professionals. His mother is an educator and has been for more than 20 years. His father is a retired business owner. He owned a small variety store in the Lowcountry of the state. The small variety store was located directly across the street from the high school Mr. Javien attended. He grew up in a home next to the store.

Mr. Javien's maternal great-grandmother was also a teacher and was among few Black people who hold a master's degree during Reconstruction and Jim Crow segregation. His maternal grandmother, a graduate of Fisk University, was a former elementary teacher and school principal in the same district in which he currently teaches. Fisk University is a prominent historically Black college that was instrumental in providing Black students opportunities to pursue post-secondary education.

Although he comes from a lineage of educators in his family, he never had any interest in becoming a teacher. In fact, he has a professional background in sociology. Pursuing this degree, he knew he wanted to work to uplift the Black community, which was a responsibility taught to him by his mother and father in his early years. While pursuing his degree at an HBCU, he was very active and played an instrumental role in several organizations including the National Association of the Advancement of Color People (NAACP) and the Pan African Association. After graduating from an HBCU in the Southeastern U.S., he worked as a social worker for many years before he became a teacher's assistant in a special education classroom. Taking on this position, he fell in love with his job as a teacher's assistant and returned to school to pursue a master's degree in early childhood education. He said, "What drove me into the classroom was what I saw in that classroom as a teacher's assistant. Anything that could have happened in there happened, I wanted to be a part of it." Once he completed his master's degree, his first professional teaching job offer was in a rural school district in the Midlands where he currently serves as the district's first and only Black male kindergarten teacher. The district's human resources department verified he was the first and only Black male teacher ever employed in the district. Mr. Javien commented, "I pride myself as being

the first Black male kindergarten teacher in this school district.” He also admits that he was not always enthused about teaching kindergarten. In fact, he was offered several opportunities to teach kindergarten by the former principal of his current school, but turned it down on multiple occasions because he “was just not interested in teaching kindergarten.” All he could think about is “having to tie children’s shoelaces and wipe runny noses.” However, he admits that he has grown to love teaching kindergarten and that teaching at this level has challenged and given him a new perspective on many levels.

Although Javien does have future aspirations to pursue a career in school administration, he enjoys impacting the lives of the young boys and girls he encounters every year he signs his contract to return to his kindergarten classroom. He has been teaching kindergarten for six years in the same school district. His principal acknowledges his success in the classroom. His principal noted, “Mr. Javien does an exceptional job with his students...by far one of the best teachers I’ve seen in kindergarten, and I believe that participating in this study will continue to help him develop that love and passion for what he does.” Parents echoed similar compliments regarding Mr. Javien throughout the research process.

Of all of the research participants, I have known Mr. Javien the longest. In fact, we attended the same high school in the Lowcountry. We reconnected in his current school district where I formerly worked as a school administrator for four years. He led me to the other Black male kindergarten teachers who are and were potential participants in this study. During my tenure as a principal, I remembered his principal always speaking highly of the work he was doing in the kindergarten classroom. She always

described him as a “consummate professional who really knows how to help improve the academic outcomes of his students.” Mr. Javien became the inspiration for this study as he reminded me of my former kindergarten teacher. I wanted to learn more about him and his practices in the classroom that influence academic achievement outcomes among Black male students.

During his spare time, Mr. Javien likes attending professional early childhood conferences to learn about current instructional practices he can use to engage his students. Although he admits that most of strategies are not relevant to his students, he takes them and adjusts them to make teaching relevant to his children. He also likes traveling and pursuing education. He is currently enrolled in a graduate program where he is currently pursuing the Educational Specialist degree in school administration.

During my observations, Mr. Javien always carried himself in such a way that gained respect from his students and his colleagues. He was so respected that his colleagues often came to him for professional advice. Beyond the classroom, Mr. Javien spends a lot of time volunteering in his school and local community. He remains active in his local chapter of the NAACP and in the National Urban League where he was selected to participate in its community leader’s development program. The program prepares citizen to take an active role in community leadership.

### **Mr. Henry**

Mr. Henry, a 25-year old Black male with the physical build of a football player, was previously introduced to me by another kindergarten teacher who worked in the same school district with him in the Midlands about two years ago. However, I lost contact with him. He was then reintroduced to me by one of the participants in this study



(Mr. Javien). Mr. Henry was a research participant in an earlier case study I conducted on a Black male kindergarten teacher entitled, *Are you sure you know what you're doing? The Lived Experiences of an African American Male Kindergarten Teacher* (Bryan & Browder, 2013). In this study, Mr. Henry shared challenges including racial microaggressions and other forms of discrimination at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the South that negatively impacted his journey to the kindergarten classroom. He also spoke of national teaching assessments including PRAXIS *I and II* and other institutional and structural factors that delayed his entrée into professional teaching. He noted that he “had to take the PRAXIS II twice” before he could receive his initial certification to teach. All of these setbacks were discouraging but did not preclude him from entering into the profession. Confronting racism on his predominantly white college campus made him more consciously aware of racism in society. He became active in several on-campus organizations through the Office of Multicultural Affairs to combat social injustices on campus.

Growing up in the Midlands of the state (about 30 minutes from the state’s capital), Mr. Henry learned early about the importance of hard work from his working-class parents. His mother was an executive assistant to the Dean at a college in his hometown. She taught him the importance of hard work. His father worked at an industrial plant about 30 minutes away from where his family resided. He suggested that although both of his parents lived at home, his mother seemingly was more involved in his life, considering his father’s challenging and unpredictable work schedule. However, collectively, they helped develop a healthy racial identity by engaging in conversations

about the positive contributions of Black people in the United States and his need to continue to build on those legacies.

At a very early age, Henry knew he wanted to become a teacher. He decided to participate in the Teacher Cadet program at his predominantly Black high school. Teacher Cadet enables high schools students who are interested in the teaching profession to become familiar with the teaching profession and public school classroom settings through internship opportunities. While in high school, he was not only known for his academic prowess, but also his gift and talents on the football field. He received a football scholarship to attend a Predominantly White Institution in the state; however, his football career would be short-lived due to injuries he sustained during football practice.

Although his football career did not come to fruition, he continued to pursue a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education. He felt his pre-service teacher education program somewhat prepared him for the realities of the classroom. Although he took courses geared towards teaching children of color, he thought that more of such courses were needed in his program to better prepare pre-service teachers in general.

Presently, Mr. Henry still finds solace in the kindergarten classroom and the football field. He teaches at a predominantly white elementary school in a suburban school district in the Midlands. He also serves as a football coach at the local in the district. Having these experiences, make his journey as an educator an enjoyable one.

Before taking a teaching position at his current school, he worked in a predominantly Black school district and school in the Midlands but decided to leave after three years to work closer to where he currently lives. It is evident that he often misses his former school because he constantly makes comparison between it and his current

one. He relates, “At Clover Lewis (pseudonym), I could spend more time on lessons but here [his present school], I have to move at a faster pace.” He admits that teaching at a predominantly white elementary school is a culture shock.

Mr. Henry has worked towards pursuing National Board Teacher Certification. However, he was unsuccessful at his first attempt. He is also interested in becoming a school administrator. He will soon enroll in the graduate program at the state’s flagship university. In the meantime, he enjoys the kindergarten classroom. When encouraged to teach upper elementary school grade levels, he always declines. He sees kindergarten as the space where “teachers build on what children learn and everything they need to know, and other teachers in upper grades just built on what they already know.” In other words, he sees himself as one who provides students the foundational skills to be success in their future academic careers. The students love him at his current school, even those who are not enrolled in his classroom. During several observations, I noted that students, both Black and White, often left the presence of their classroom teachers without permission to give Mr. Henry hugs. This happened quite frequently in the hallways and the cafeteria.

Mr. Henry is also well respected by his colleagues and parents. His principal sees him as “a great hire and addition to the school.” Parents also feel that his presence provides motivation to their child/children to come to school. One parent noted that she used Mr. Henry as a motivational tool to encourage her Black male son to come to school.

### **Mr. Tal**

A 24- year old teacher, Mr. Tal is in his third year of teaching at a predominantly Black elementary school in the Lowcountry where he was once a former student. He now

has the opportunity to work with some teachers who actually taught him as a young child. He remembered that many of his teachers at this school took special interest in him as a child who grew up in a single-parent home. His mother primarily raised him and his sister in the Tiller Plains community (pseudonym) where the school resides. Because he grew up in the community, he finds much joy giving back to it. He finds time to volunteer in his community through his local church and other organizations including the Boys and Girls Club of America.

Mr. Tal was not always a kindergarten teacher. In his beginning years of teaching, he taught second grade but his current principal requested that he teach kindergarten because of the success he had previously with students in second grade. She thought his pedagogical skills could serve as a resource for students who would could 'unprepared for' kindergarten. Mr. Tal admits that he did not originally want to teach kindergarten. In fact, he did not feel his pre-service teacher experience prepared him to do so because he was never provided an opportunity to serve as a pre-service teacher intern in a kindergarten classroom. However, despite such trepidation and since he has been given the opportunity, he really loves and enjoys what he does therein.

Before working in his current capacity, he attended a local private college in the Lowcountry where he pursued a bachelor's degree in elementary education. He faced many challenging experiences at his colleges to include issues of race and racism. Academically, he faced challenges passing the PRAXIS examination for teacher certification. He was also a member of the *Call Me Mister* program at this institution. *Call Me Mister* is a program designed to recruit Black male teachers to K-12 classrooms, particularly in schools that demonstrate need for Black male teachers (Jones & Jenkins,

2012). While in his third year of teaching, he continues to demonstrate the ideals of the *Call Me Mister program*, mainly servant leadership, in his kindergarten classroom. He sees his task as a calling to “serve and give back to his community.”

To demonstrate his passion for teaching and learning, Mr. Tal shared early childhood memories of playing school with his sister “with whom he collaborated with effort.” He recalled, “I use to play school...that’s a disclaimer which I consider abnormal. It was always one of those insatiable things I loved to do. I always felt it was something I enjoyed deeply.” He also mentioned that his middle school social studies teacher fueled his desire to become a teacher. He described her as an individual who demonstrated proficiency in her content area that piqued his interest. He described, “It was how she presented the material. I was receptive to it. I enjoyed learning it. The way she taught Social Studies... it was very relevant. It was something that I felt like I always wanted to know more about what she doing. It was something that applied to a real world situation.”

Mr. Tal has a love for personal learning. He pursued a master’s degree in reading from an online institution. He shares his passion for reading with his students. He desires to pursue a doctoral degree in school administration in the future. However, in the meantime, he enjoys learning with and from the youngsters in his classroom.

Mr. Tal is also well respected by colleagues and parents. His principal sees him as “a great addition to the staff.” His colleagues often seek him out for professional ideas and advice. He is always willing to share the latest instructional strategies and activities he has used in his classroom with them. Likewise, parents see him as being very resourceful and helpful inside and outside of the classroom. They often volunteer to bring

supplies for all of the children. During one of my observations, a parent brought snacks that would last until the end of the school year for Mr. Tal and his students. Table 4.1 displays the profiles of all three participants.

Table 4.1

*Black Male Teacher Participant Profiles*

Name	Age	Years Teaching	Undergraduate Preparation	Geographic Location	School Context	Total# of Black Male Students
Javien	35	6	HBCU	Midlands	Rural	9
Henry	25	4	PWI	Midlands	Suburban	4
Tal	24	3	PWI	Lowcountry	Urban	11

**Black Male Student and Family Member Participants.** Table 4.2 represents Black male students and family members who participated in the study from each of the three aforementioned Black male kindergarten teachers' classrooms. Out of a collective total of 24 Black male students across all 3 classrooms, there are 12 Black male student participants between the ages of 5-6 years old in this study. At the time of this study, 5 students qualified for free and/or reduced lunch. All demonstrated average to above average performance in their kindergarten classrooms as evidenced via their kindergarten report card, which is based on South Carolina kindergarten standards. Average performance indicates that they met and/or were meeting academic expectations for kindergarten; whereas above average performance indicates that they exceeded academic expectations for kindergarten. These students all started and ended the school year in each of the Black male kindergarten teachers' classrooms. In other words, they spent 9 months (August-June) under the tutelage and guidance of these Black male teachers. Similarly, there were 7 Black family members who participated in this study. To

reiterate, 4 family members, who signed consent forms to participate in the study, decided not to participate at the last minute. Because the family structure in Black communities is often different than mainstream familial structures (Boutte & Johnson, 2014) grandmothers and other caregivers who were raising Black male students were also included in this study. There were 6 Black women in this study, out of which 4 self-identified as mothers of the Black male student participants in this study. Two of the Black women are grandmothers of Black male student participants. There was also a Black male who was the father of one of the Black male students. Moreover, there was a White woman who participated in the study. She is the adopted mother of one of the Black male participants. Out of the 8 families represented, five families requested that their sons be enrolled in two of the teachers' (Mr. Javien and Mr. Henry) classrooms. The family members of 3 of the participants in this study requested that their sons be enrolled in Mr. Javien's class. Similarly, 2 families requested that their sons be enrolled in Mr. Henry's class.

Table 4.2

*Black Male Student and Family Member Participants' Profiles*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Family Member</b>	<b>Relationship</b>
<b>Ameer</b>	6	Javien	Mrs. Martha	Grandmother
<b>Demarcus</b>	6	Javien	Mrs. Martha	Grandmother
<b>Marquavious</b>	6	Javien	Mrs. Cherise	Mother
<b>Joshua</b>	5	Henry	Mrs. Felice	Mother
<b>Dillon</b>	6	Henry	Mrs. Felice	Mother
<b>Mario</b>	6	Henry	Mrs. Felice	Mother
<b>Roland</b>	6	Henry	Mrs. Boin	Mother
<b>Braden</b>	6	Tal	Mr. Raton	Father
<b>Maurice</b>	6	Tal	Mrs. Aretha	Grandmother
<b>Montrell</b>	5	Tal	Mrs. Aretha	Grandmother
<b>Cameron</b>	5	Tal	Mrs. April	Mother
<b>Zion</b>	6	Tal	Mrs. Kathey	Adopted Mother

## **School Contexts**

Below is a brief description of the school context in which each teacher worked at the time of this study. I have used pseudonyms to keep the names of each school confidential. Table 4.3 provides an overview of the school contexts.

### **Simon Elementary School — Mr. Javien**

Simon Elementary is a Title One school located in a rural area in the Midlands of a state in the Southeastern United States. Title One schools are those schools where 40% of students who attend are from low-income families (Milner, 2014). Based on South Carolina School Report Card Data, Simon Elementary School received an ‘average’ rating for student academic performance in 2014 after having been identified as ‘below average’ for three consecutive years. According to the South Carolina School Report Card, an average rating meant that “the school performance meets the standards for progress towards the 2020 South Carolina Performance Vision” (South Carolina Department of Education, 2013) . Below average meant that the school was in jeopardy of not meeting the 2020 South Carolina Performance Vision. The South Carolina Performance Vision suggests that by 2020 “all students will graduate with the knowledge and skills necessary to compete successfully in the global economy, participate in a democratic society and contribute positively as members of families and communities” (South Carolina Department of Education, 2014, no pagination). At the time of this study, there were 317 students in Child Development- 6<sup>th</sup> grade who attended the school. Ninety-eight percent of the students were African-American while two percent were White. Additionally, 90% of the students qualify for free and/or reduced lunches. The



principal of the school is a Black woman who has served in this capacity for three years. There are 25 teachers on staff. Twelve teachers were Black and 13 were White.

#### **Ponce De Leon Elementary – Mr. Henry**

Ponce De Leon Elementary school is located in the suburbs in the Midlands of a state in the Southeastern United States. The school is divided into two campuses (Lower and Upper). The lower campus serves students in Pre-K-2nd grades, while the upper campus serves students in 3<sup>rd</sup> - 5th grades. Ponce De Leon is a high-performing school and has consistently maintained an “excellent” school rating since 2012. According to the South Carolina School Report Card, the school exceeds expectations for meeting the SC Performance Vision 2020. At the time of this study, there were 797 students who attended both upper and lower campuses. Ninety-seven percent of the students are White; one percent was African-American, and one percent was Latino and Asian. Additionally, less than 30 percent of students qualify for free and/or reduced lunches. The principal of the school is a White woman who has served in this capacity for four years. There are 50 teachers on staff, 30 of whom hold National Board Certification. Forty-two teachers were White; whereas 5 teachers were Black. There were also 3 Latino teachers.

#### **Tillers Plain Elementary School – Mr. Tal**

Tillers Plain Elementary School is a Pre-K-5<sup>th</sup> grade Title One School located in an urban area of the Lowcountry of a state in the Southeastern United States. Identified by the federal government, Title One schools are K-12 schools that serve 40% of students who live below the poverty line (NCES, 2014). According to the South Carolina School Report Card, Tiller Plain Elementary school has consistently maintained an ‘average’ school rating since 2012. At the time of this study, there were 622 students who attended

the school. Ninety-eight percent of the students are African-American and two percent are Latino. Ninety-seven percent of the students qualify for free and/or reduced lunches. The principal of the school is a White woman who has served in this capacity for seven years. There are forty-five (45) teachers on staff. Twenty-three teachers were White. Eighteen teachers were Black. There were 3 Latino teachers and 1 Asian teacher.

Table 4.3

*School Contexts*

<b>School</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Racial Demographics</b>	<b>Number of Teachers</b>	<b>Grade Levels</b>	<b>Type of School</b>	<b>School Rating</b>
<b>Simon</b>	Mr. Javien	317	Predominantly Black	25	PK-6	Rural	Average
<b>Ponce De Leon</b>	Mr. Henry	797	Predominantly White	50	PK- 5th	Suburban	Excellent
<b>Tillers Plain</b>	Mr. Tal	622	Predominantly Black	45	PK- 5th	Urban	Average

**Classroom Demographics**

Because these teachers were neither assigned to single-gender including only male students nor racially homogeneous classrooms in most cases, I provide some important classroom demographic, which illustrate the number of students based on gender and race. It is not my desire to ignore the other children in these classrooms, but instead I have chosen to amplify the experiences and interactions that these teachers have with their Black male students. At the time of this study, Mr. Javien has a total of 21 students including 10 Black males, 8 Black females, 2 White males, and 1 White female. Mr. Henry had a total of 19 students, which included 1 Asian male, 1 Asian female, 6

Black males, 2 Black females, 1 Latino male, 1 Latina female, 3 White males, and 4 White females. Mr. Tal's class included a total of 25 students, which consisted of 12 Black males, 5 Black females, 1 Latino male, 5 Latina females, and 1 White male. Table 4.4 provides an overview of classroom demographic information for each classroom.

Table 4.4

*Classroom Demographics*

<b>Classroom Demographics By Teacher</b>	<b>Mr. Javien</b>	<b>Mr. Henry</b>	<b>Mr. Tal</b>
<b>Number of Students</b>	21	19	25
<b>Number of Males</b>	12	10	15
<b>Number of Females</b>	9	9	10
<b>Asian Males</b>	0	1	0
<b>Asian Females</b>	0	1	0
<b>Black Males</b>	10	6	12
<b>Black Females</b>	8	2	5
<b>Latino Males</b>	0	1	2
<b>Latino Females</b>	0	1	5
<b>White Males</b>	2	3	1
<b>White Females</b>	1	4	0

**Black Male Academic Achievement Data.** I want to be clear as I use academic achievement data in this study. I have come to understand that Ladson-Billings (2009) does not define academic success based on short-term national and state-level test scores but long-term academic achievement. In other words, Ladson-Billings (2006) defines

academic success as “student learning- what it is that students actually know and are able to do as a result of pedagogical interactions with skilled teachers” (p. 34). Similarly, I have come to understand that many educators focus on outcomes/outputs and not what Milner (2015) refers to as the “inputs” (p. 6) or the in-school factors including instructional practices, resources and/or lack thereof, and school culture that could negatively impact student outcomes. Clearly, students are more than numerical test scores (Milner, 2015). However, my study follows the pattern of other studies on culturally relevant education that use standardized tests, while also connecting culturally relevant teaching to student academic outcomes (Choi, 2013; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Hubert, 2013; Nykiel-Herbert, 2010; Rodriquez et al., 2004). I do not solely rely on standardized test data to demonstrate the impact of culturally relevant teaching on the academic outcomes of Black male kindergartners. I have come to understand that standard tests are components of neoliberal education that continue to marginalize historically oppressed populations (Aronson & Laughter, 2015; Kumashiro, 2012). Like other studies that connect culturally relevant education to affective domains, my study not only highlights standardized tests data, but will also demonstrate later the influence of culturally relevant teaching on affective domains including student motivation, interest, and positive perception of self (Aronson & Laughter, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009). I argue that because many scholars have bought into short-term, neoliberal conceptions of student achievement and arguments are generating regarding teacher pay for performance based on them (Milner, 2015), culturally relevant teachers must demonstrate impact on both long-term and short-term academic outcomes (Aronson & Laughter, 2015).

Because this study focuses on the constructed identities and pedagogical styles that influence academic achievement outcomes among Black male students, I provide an overview of each teacher's Black male student achievement data in reading over the course of two consecutive semesters. To counter the stereotypical notion suggesting that Black boys do and cannot read (Tatum, 2005; Haddix, 2009; Kirkland, 2011) and to acknowledge the consistency in reading data provided by each Black male teacher, I decided to provide academic data in reading. Selecting each teacher's reading data does not suggest that they were not producing high achievement outcomes and affective domains in other academic areas. These Black male teachers were also producing high-achievement outcomes in other tested content areas including math and writing. Tables 5 provide an overview of each teacher's Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) data in reading for both participating and non-participating Black male students in this study. MAP is widely used throughout the nation and state to assess students' content knowledge in the areas of math, reading, and writing. According to the Northwest Evaluation Association (2015), MAP is an online assessment tool used to "create a personalized assessment experience by adapting to each student's learning level—precisely measuring student progress and growth for each individual (no pagination)." In all of the schools, students were administered the MAP assessment during Winter 2014 and Spring 2015 sessions to measure students' academic growth. Appendix H represents student MAP data. I use pseudonyms to keep confidential the name of each student. I placed an asterisk (\*) next to the names of the data associated with those Black male students who participated in this study. Additionally, the data include the goals for both Winter and Spring MAP administration, students' scores, and the difference between

Winter and Spring scores. The variances in MAP goals exist because each school district selects its own goals for both Winter and Spring MAP administration. The range of score goals is between 140-155 points. Student scores that surpass the district-indicated goals are deemed successfully meeting district goals and expectations for learning.

### **Rationale for and the Selection of Critical Race Research Methodologies**

*Critical Race Methodology.* Considering that Black masculinity, fictive kinship networks, culturally relevant pedagogy, and critical race theory are complementary frameworks, I have selected a complementary, yet meaningful, and rigorous research methodology (Cook, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Within the multidimensional theoretical framework, CRT is the only theory that possesses a methodological component; therefore, I used it as a methodology in this study. Critical race methodologists (Cook, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2012) acknowledge that CRT is complex in that it serves as both theory and methodology. On one hand, the theory of CRT examines how structural and institutional inequities disadvantage Black people and other people of color while advantaging White people. The methodological component of CRT challenges positivistic epistemological canons that invalidate, decenter, and ignore the lived realities and experiences of those who have been historically marginalized (Cook, 2013; Milner, 2007; Solórzano & Yosso, 2012). Specifically, in education, critical race methodology seeks to dismantle White supremacy, power, and privilege and to uncover master narratives and deficit research that deny the racialized experiences of people of color. Thus, critical race methodology is appropriate to examine the constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers who have been

historically marginalized in a field of education that remain largely White and female because it is also multidimensional (Aud et al., 2014).

*Counter-storytelling.* One methodological CRT strategy is counter-storytelling. People of color often use counter-storytelling to challenge deficit storytelling and inaccurate stories from members of the dominant cultural group (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). It “aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 144). Counterstorytelling enables Black and other people of color to expose American untruths and attack them (Farber & Sherry, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Lester (1969) asserts that “Black people can see very clearly that America is a nation built on inhumanity. The signers of the Declaration of Independence put down their quills to go home and beat slaves. Blacks have always been aware of what America really is, but unable until now to forcefully attack it” (p. 10). Cook (2013) and Solórzano and Yosso (2002) noted that, historically, the voices of people of color have been excluded from mainstream research studies; thus, prioritizing master narratives about people of color. Therefore, counter-storytelling counter gives voice to people who have been marginalized. Dantley (2010) contends that these master narratives present an essentialized version of and an unnecessary celebrated truth about human condition of people of color. These master narratives are often sustained through research methodologies that are “cast in some reified notions of proper or vaunted research” (Dantley, 2010, p. 144). He calls for counter-storytelling to undo master narratives. Maxine Greene (1988) asserted that if we are to achieve a democratic society, we must find ways to include voices in research that have been seldom heard through counter-storytelling.

Specifically, considering that Howard (2014) used counterstorytelling as a methodological tool to reconceptualize research with Black male students, I employed counter-storytelling in this study to reconceptualize research with Black male teachers by exploring their constructed identities and pedagogical styles in kindergarten classrooms. Storytelling and counter-storytelling are not only grounded in a CRT tradition but also in Afrocentric ways of knowing and being (Boutte & Johnson, 2013; King, 2005; Lynn, 2006a, b). African people have a long tradition of using stories to relay their lived experiences and realities to challenge race and racism in American society (Lynn, 2006a, b; King, 2005). During the era of segregated Black schools, Black teachers used and told stories to Black students to counter “deprecating messages about [Black people’s] value and status” (Siddle-Walker, 1996, p. 151). Cook (2013) and Solórzano and Yosso (2002) contended that counter-storytelling works against the silencing of those who have been historically oppressed. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) used counter-storytelling to challenge dominant liberal ideologies that prioritize colorblindness, objectivity, neutrality, and meritocracy in society and educational institutions. Solórzano and Yosso (2012) identified three types of counterstories/narratives including (a) personal narratives; (b) other people’s narratives; and (c) composite narratives. These narratives all serve to facilitate the uplift and build people who are positioned at the bottom of societal rungs, to challenge the ideologies and assumptions of those who are positioned at the center, and to serve as both pedagogical and learning tools to build realities of people of color relative to the way of the world (Cook, 2013). I use other people’s narratives.

Delgado (1989) described counterstories in several styles including chronicles, narratives, allegories, parables, and dialogues. However, although my work does not



deviate from Delgado's styles, I argue that counterstories should not be limited to these particular styles because historically oppressed people, Black people in this case, have used many styles including art, literature, music, and songs to counter master narratives and to speak truth to power (Walker, 1982; West & Buschendorff, 2014). The styles were prevalent during social movements including the Harlem Renaissance and Chicago Realism as a way to respond to institutional racism that blocked Blacks from having access to publishers who would acknowledge and publish their intellectual work (Grant et al., 2015). Grant et al. (2015) contend that the "Harlem Renaissance and Chicago Realism allowed Blacks to use different genres of art, speech, and written word to give meaning and vindication to Black life and histories" (p. 8). During the time of this study, many Black youth participated in the Black Live Matters Movement (Taylor, 2016), which is a social movement purported to respond to institutional racism in the form of police brutality and the horrendous slaughtering of unarmed Black men. Similarly Black Lives Matters participants used many artistic forms to respond to such institutional racism.

If CRT scholars desire to engage in critical race praxis or CRT on-the-ground and in communities (Stovall, 2013), CRT scholars should commit to acknowledging more inclusive ways to engage in critical race counterstorytelling to include those counterstorytelling practices familiar to Black and other communities of color or other ways to engage in critical race counterstorytelling beyond those prescribed in academia to make it more accessible to those individuals who have been historically disenfranchised. I am not suggesting that all counterstories are accessible to marginalized communities;

however, I do believe, in the case of the works of many scholars (Cook, 2008; Cook & Dixon, 2013; Johnson, 2014), they can be made accessible to broader communities.

Drawing from Delgado's styles, I used specifically dialogues to explore the constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers. Historically, dialogues or oral exchanges have been used "to aid philosophical inquiry" (Martinez, 2014, p. 38). However, in the Afrocentric tradition, dialogues have been useful and particularly important to express Black ways of knowing and being (Boutte & Johnson, 2013). Black mothers and fathers engage in dialogues with their sons (and daughters) to discuss what it means to be Black and male (and female respectively) and that race matters in America (Coates, 2015; Johnson, 2014; West, 2000). Boutte and Johnson (2013) also used similar dialogues in a case study examining biliteracy and bilingualism among their Black granddaughters as a way to encourage teachers to embrace biliteracy and bilingualism among Black children in public schools. Cornel West (2014) also used a dialogic format in his most recent scholarly work entitled *The Black Prophetic Fire* where he engages in dialogue with German scholar Christa Buschendorf about the black prophetic fire or the gift of being on fire for justice possessed by Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. DuBois, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Ella Baker, Malcolm X, and Ida B. Wells. Considering that West's (2014) work is written in dialogic prose and to honor the black prophetic fire of these Black male kindergarten teachers, I employ such prose by having my research participants including Black male kindergarten teachers, Black male students, and Black families engage in the dialogic process through counterstorytelling about the identities, the ability to support Black male students, and the pedagogical styles of Black male teachers. Finally, using critical race methodology, McKay (2010) uses a

dialogic prose to engage a critical race conversation with Black adult learners regarding their experiences in an Afrocentric community education course. Like few scholars (Johnson, 2014), I use performative writing to engage in counterstorytelling.

*Performative Writing.* While many scholars may argue that counterstorytelling is performative in and of itself, I also see it as performative in nature. However, I argue that not all counterstories are performative. Some counterstories are specifically written for performance; while others are not and are written and presented differently from traditional counterstories (see Cook, 2008; Johnson, 2014). Therefore, I use performative writing to convey the counterstories used in this study. Performative writing is a performance-based method in qualitative research that challenges traditional qualitative research methods by providing alternative ways to represent research data (Denzin, 2005, 2006). Informed heavily by critical theory, it is what Denzin (2006) refers to as a “radical democratic practice” (p. 23). Grounded in a post-modern tradition, performative writing is an interpretative methodology that “language and performance empower, and humans can become who they wish to be, free of prejudice, repression, and discrimination” (Denzin, 2006, p. 24). Phelan (1997) notes that performative writing “enacts the death of the ‘we’ that we think we are before we begin to write. A statement of allegiance to the radicality of unknowing who we are becoming, this writing pushes against the ideology of knowledge as a progressive movement forever approaching a completed end point” (p. 17).

While I acknowledge my style of counterstorytelling as drawn from a postmodern performative writing tradition (Denzin, 2006), I also argue that performative writing styles are consistent with Black scholarly research traditions that were prevalent before

the postmodern movement out of which performative writing is drawn (Aldrige, 2003; Du Bois, 1933; Foster, 1997; Grant, Brown & Brown, 2015; Stanfield, 1994). In other words, DuBois (1903) used such innovative performative styles to critique Whiteness and White Supremacy (Rabaka, 2013). For example, in his germinal work entitled, *the Souls of Black Folks*, DuBois (1903) “combined scientific essayistic writing with the poetic. And the reason for this was really that he wanted to reach out. He knew he could not reach people otherwise” (West & Buschendorf, 2014, p. 50). Similarly, Ida B. Wells, in the capacity of a journalist, does not “report in a regular way, but she presents dramatic portraits with statistics, with empirical data, but also stories (West & Buschendorf, 2014, p. 147). Therefore, to suggest that these styles were drawn out of a postmodern movement is another way to appropriate Black cultural ingenuity. Additionally, Black scholars have historically desired their scholarly work to be accessible to broader Black communities. I follow in the footsteps of my Black scholarly foremothers and fathers.

Although many scholars who study Black male teachers have utilized counter-storytelling as a methodology to construct their identities and pedagogical styles (Brown, 2009, 2011; Lynn, 2006a, b), at the time of this study, I could not find many studies during my search that have explored the use of both performative writing and counterstorytelling to describe and present findings on Black male teachers. One specific example is Johnson (2014) who merged critical race methodology through the use of composite counterstorytelling with performative writing in a study where he examined himself as a Black male high school English Language Arts teacher. He also used a critical family literacy book club to facilitate race-based conversations among urban high

school students and parents in the Southeastern U.S. In this study, Johnson uses performative writing in the form of a play to analyze and present his study's findings.

### **Data Collection Methods**

To conduct this study, I used the following data collection methods: (A) semi-structured/unstructured interviews; (B) classroom observations/field notes; (C) document analysis (lesson plans, teacher evaluations, parent letters, and other artifacts); and (d) focus groups. Data collection for this study occurred over a nine-month period. Table 4.5 presents the research questions, data sources, and data analyses. Additionally, each of the data collection methods enabled me to explore the stories, dialogues, verbal, and non-verbal interactions of Black male teachers, Black male students, and family members regarding the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers. Therefore, the counterstories through performative writing of the research participants, and the setting within each counterstorytelling derive directly from the interviews, classroom observations and field notes, focus groups, and document analysis. Each data collection method is briefly discussed below.

Table 4.5

*Research Questions, Data Sources, Research Participants, and Data Analyses*

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Data Sources</b>	<b>Research Participants</b>	<b>Data Analyses</b>
1. How do Black male kindergarten teachers perceive, respond to, and negotiate the pre-determined positioning of Black male teachers as social change agents (i.e. role models and father figures)?	Semi-structured/unstructured interviews  Observations/field notes	Black male teachers	Thematic analysis of interviews and field notes/observation data

2. What are the constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers who influence academic achievement outcomes among Black males?	Semi-structured/ unstructured interviews	Black male teachers	Thematic analysis of interviews and field notes/ observation data.
	Observations/ field notes	Black students	
	Documents (e.g., lesson plans)	Black family members	Thematic analysis of documents
3. How do Black male students perceive the identities, the ability to support their academic success and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers?	Semi-structured/ unstructured interviews	Black male students	Thematic analysis of focus groups
	Focus groups		
4. How do Black family members perceive the identities, the ability to support students' academic success, and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers?	Focus groups	Black family members	Thematic analysis of focus groups

### Interviews

I used two types of interviews including semi-structured and unstructured to conduct this study. Semi-structured interviews were used because they provided very flexible and reliable data (Delamont, 2012), and they allowed the researcher to interject questions into the interview process based on the participants' responses. Black male kindergarten teacher participants participated in three 60-90 minutes semi-structured interviews. The first interview was used to build relationships with the research participants and to establish the context of the participants' professional experiences as Black male kindergarten teachers. The subsequent interviews focused on how they

constructed their identities and pedagogical styles that influence academic achievement outcomes among Black male students. Semi-structured interviews took place on school sites and/or spaces that were comfortable for the research participants. All three interviews were taped recorded for the data collecting, transcribing, and coding process. Sample interview questions can be found in the Appendix E. Unstructured interviews were also used to interview both Black male teacher participants and the students. Unstructured interviews are not prearranged (Delamont, 2012). In other words, interview questions are not predetermined before unstructured interviews. Unstructured interviews occurred throughout the entire process. During classroom observations and transitions between school-related activities, I asked questions regarding specific practices as a way to clarify and better understand them. I also used unstructured interviews with Black male students to inquire about class-related activities and their teachers.

### **Classroom Observations and Field Notes**

Observations are useful in obtaining in-depth descriptions of events and are also helpful in gaining information about people in their natural environment (Patton, 2001). Fields notes are used to record events that may take place in the research participant's environment. Within the six-month timeframe of the study, I conducted weekly classroom observations to study the identities and pedagogical styles of the research participants. These observations were both planned and random. Planned observations lasted an entire school day. Random observations lasted half-days or four hours out of the eight-hour day. I used the first three weeks of classroom observations to familiarize myself with the daily operations of the classroom, students, teacher, and school. I was able to build positive professional relationships with students, teacher assistants, and

other teachers in the school prior to engaging in observations. During the observations, I took field notes. I compiled all of my field notes in a notebook that I stored in a locked file cabinet when not in use. Table 4.6 provides a weekly schedule of both planned and random observations.

Table 4.6

*Weekly Observation Schedule*

	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Javien	P	P	R	P	P	R	R	R	P	P	P	R	R	P	P
Henry	P	P	R	P	P	R	R	R	P	P	P	R	R	P	P
Tal	P	P	R	P	P	R	R	R	P	P	P	R	R	P	P

*Note: W represents 'Week', P represents 'Planned' and R represents 'Random'*

### **Document Analysis**

Document analysis enables the researcher to interpret documents to give meaning to them (Patton, 2001). Using this method of analysis, researchers are able to code documents to develop themes (Patton, 2001). Patton (2001) identifies three types of documents used in document analysis including public records, personal documents, and physical evidence. Public records are organizational documents. Personal documents are first-person actions. Physical evidence is documents within the research setting. I used physical evidence. I collected weekly lesson plans and other artifacts (administrative observation, teacher evaluations, and parent letters) to make meaning of them in determining the pedagogical styles of my research participants. I asked questions about the documents during semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Sample questions can be found in Appendix B.



## **Focus Groups**

Patton (2001) describes a focus group as a type of qualitative research method geared towards eliciting responses, opinions, and perception of a specific phenomenon from a group of people. I used focus groups to elicit the responses, opinions, and perception regarding the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers from Black family members. I conducted three different focus groups with family members of Black male students (one for each research participants' class). These focus groups lasted between 1-2 hours onsite at each school. Specifically, they occurred in the participating teachers' classroom at the end of the school day or another designated area within the school in the absence of the participating teacher. Sample focus group questions can be found in Appendix G.

### **Focus Groups With Young Children**

I also used and conducted three different focus groups with Black male kindergartners to determine how they perceived the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers. These focus groups lasted between 30-45 minutes in classroom settings during recess and/or related arts time. While focus groups with young children are not widely used in the field of education, a dearth of educational scholars (Greene & Hogan, 2005; Lewis, 1992) have conducted focus groups with young children. I primarily used focus groups with young children "to stimulate [them] to present points that may be neglected in individual interviews..." (Greene & Hogan, 2005, p. 237). Appendix F outlines the student focus group questions.

## **Data Analysis**

Considering that I have used a multidimensional framework including Black masculinity, fictive kinship network, culturally relevant pedagogy, and critical race theory, I used these frameworks as analytic tools. Once I received transcripts of interviews, I engaged in four coding rounds for data from each set of research participants including Black male kindergarten teachers, Black male students, and Black family members. These coding rounds include Protocol, In vivo, Emotion, and Descriptive coding. Below I explain each coding round and process.

The first round of coding was Protocol coding. Protocol coding enables the researcher to use a pre-established system in qualitative data to code data (Saldana, 2010). In this study, the pre-established systems are the frameworks including fictive kinship network, culturally relevant pedagogy, critical race theory, and Black masculinity. The second coding round was In vivo (Saldaña, 2010). Saldaña (2010) suggests that In vivo coding enables the researcher to draw from the authentic voices of the research participants. In vivo coding allows for the use of direct quotes, which is consistent with the oral tradition of Black people (Foster, 1997; Stanfield, 1994; Tillman, 2008). The third round of coding was Emotion coding. Emotion coding enables the researcher to capture the emotions in any given phenomena of the research participants (Saldaña, 2010). The fourth round of coding was descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2010). Descriptive coding enables the researcher to uncover the depth and breathe of the research participant's opinions (Saldaña, 2010).

I examined the data for patterns and emerging themes and created codes for each theme based on the tenets of each of the frameworks. I looked for Afrocentric

constructions of Black masculinity as I attempted to co-construct the identities and pedagogical of Black male kindergarten teachers. For the notion of fictive kinship, I examined ways Black male kindergarten teachers foster collaboration, cooperation, and solidarity to improve the academic outcomes of Black male kindergarteners, advocate and support their nonacademic needs, and build resiliency in them. Using the culturally relevant teaching framework, I examined the data for examples of long-term academic success, cultural competence, and critical awareness among Black male kindergarteners. For Critical Race Theory, I searched for examples of themes relating to the permanence of race and racism, colorblindness, intersectionality, commitment to social justice, and Whiteness as property. I created a chart that enabled me to code specifically for these tenets. Each chart is represented below.

*Black Masculinity Data Analysis Chart*

<b>Conceptions of Black Masculinity</b>	<b>In Vivo and Descriptive Examples</b>
<b>Afrocentric Constructions of Black Masculinity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I feel like I’ m a parent per se and my responsibility is to continue to mold you [referring to students]...not taking away from the actual parent but between eight o’clock and three o’clock, you’re my child and responsibility. (Mr. Javien, Interview)</li> <li>• Mr. Tal holds Maurice’s hands to calm him down and to counsel with him for an extended period of one-on-one time. (Observation, December 9, 2015, Classroom).</li> <li>• Black male students encircle Mr. Henry during literacy circle listening attentively to <i>Little Martin</i>, a book on Dr. Martin Luther King. Mr. Henry commented, “When you see people not being treated fairly, you need to do something about it.” (Mr. Henry, Classroom Observation).</li> </ul>

<b>Deficit Construction of Black Masculinity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• And role models like you (referring to the researcher)... you can walk through the halls and see the boys going through there and you know at this stage you can tell who they following with their pants saggin. We need more young Black mens as role models so our younger crew can do better. (Mrs. Martha, Focus Group)</li> <li>• That's so important because some children don't have male figures at home. (Mrs. Cherise, Focus Group)</li> </ul>
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*Fictive Kinship Network Chart*

<b>Notion of Fictive Kin</b>	<b>In vivo and Descriptive Examples</b>
<b>Fostering collaboration, cooperation, and solidarity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. Tal communicates with a Black mother during a Parent-Teacher conference. The mother recommended that Keon receive more homework because he seemed to struggle mastering certain concept in Math. She was afraid that he would become further behind, if he did not master those skills. She recommended that Mr. Tal provide additional activities to support learning at home. Mr. Tal thought it was a good idea and committed to providing more homework to practices and websites she could used to support her son. (Observation, Mr. Tal's Classroom)</li> </ul>
<b>Advocating for and supporting the non-academic needs of Black students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well I think...one of the things that is different for me from other teachers...and I cannot say that I am better than the other. I think each of us are good in our own different rights but I try to get to know the whole child. I'm saying ...I ride the bus at least two or three times a year to learn about what area you're [referring to his students] living in...your environment...I walk around the community talking to people. I try to make connects with the parents. I try to do things outside the classroom. If you're child is in football, baseball, or basketball, I come to the games. (Mr. Javien, Interview)</li> </ul>

<b>Building Resiliency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. Javien encourage the students to talk to him. He tells them you are not going to bow your head and cover your mouth...talk to me.... That's what I like about him. (Mrs. Martha, Focus Group)</li> <li>• I think it is just that. Protecting them and trying to cultivate it within them a resilient mind and spirit. I think it is protecting them and securing ...making them feel secure in the confines of my room. That they don't feel inadequate or they are not going to feel learning is not going to be always correct. Teaching mistakes is learning. (Mr. Tal, Interview)</li> </ul>
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*Culturally Relevant Data Analysis Chart*

<b>Tenets of Culturally Relevant Teaching</b>	<b>In Vivo and Descriptive Examples</b>
<b>Academic Success</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can tell by how he does his work. Like the others, Cameron is very energetic and he gets easily side-tracked but he seems to be a little bit more focused now. Like the others, He tells me all the time that 'Momma, don't you know that Mr. Tal says...' I'm like...Ok, whatever Mr. Tal says. I can tell the difference in how he focuses now. His love of just being interested in learning... I mean it's at the most random times. Like when we are riding in the car, he wants a pen and a piece of paper in the back seat. He always wants to write now. He always ask now. "Mommie how do you spell this, how do you write this?" And you know...we did this in school and we did that...and we did this center today and Mr. Tal said this and Mr. Tal said that... When you have a child who speaks about his teacher, you know like more than just during school, you can tell the impact that he has. (Mrs. April, Focus Group)</li> <li>• That's the same thing with Maurice. It's like he will start off in one area and he will go up to what they've learned. Then he'll</li> </ul>

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	<p>take it beyond. Like what is that or that...what is seventy plus seventy? He doubles it. He keeps going so I understand. It's like you don't often get children who look forward to coming to school...and they have that...to me it's priceless because I raised three others and they were smart but it was like pulling teeth...it's time to get up to go to school...you know? And with him it doesn't take much. Maurice, it's time to get up for school...he's up! You know he is ready to go. And you know you just don't get that. (Mrs. Aretha, Focus Group)</p>
<b>Cultural Competence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. Henry allows students students to compare and contrast mainstream books to Black versions of the same books. (Observation, Classroom).</li> <li>• It means I have to do more to be...to engage them per se based on what they need. I try to work with them to understand who they are per se from an African-American culture side. Switching out books to replace them with African American characters with the same story line. (Mr. Henry, Interview)</li> </ul>
<b>Critical Consciousness/ Sociopolitical awareness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well, I think society has certain preconceived stereotypes about Black males so I tell stories about my personal experiences and I hope my stories help them per se to understand what's going on in the world. You don't want them to be caught off guard because it's so easy to do... So I'll tell them that everybody won't judge you by the content of your character just as a sidebar conversation or when something in the lesson leads us to talk about... I mean... take me for example. I live in a prominent community, Lake Cassawanna (pseudonym)...and you know... I belong here like anybody else but people will do things to make me feel like I don't belong. (Mr. Javien, Interview)</li> </ul>

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Tenets of Critical Race theory	In Vivo and Descriptive Examples
<b>Permanence of race and racism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When they had his speech checked, this white woman checked his speech, she said he can't hear. This Black woman came and checked him. She said his hearing is perfect. Another white woman tested him for speech. She said that he can't talk and he might have to have his tongue clip. This Black woman came and said the total opposite. (Mrs. Martha, Focus Group)</li> <li>• Well, there's so much...there's so much racism that still is going on in this world. You know... It's not just on the White side and it's not just on the Black side... it's both. A lot of people can't come together ...you know. It's so much. I don't know if they will ever get together. You know and this mess that happened in Baltimore... My God! I hate it. I want those guys to get what's do to them. But why do they go out there and do that...mess up other people's property... and things like that? Just like the killing we just had. This was awful but I thank God that they got that man on tape. You know? (Mrs. Kathey, Focus Group)</li> </ul>
<b>The intersectionality of race racism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to be a gentlemen... a young man...not a thug. (Mr. Martha)</li> <li>• It's just... to me, you never stop worrying. You don't. Because even when my son came home ... he's overseas, the first of the year he came to visit and I worry about him. I mean...just...not in uniform...just in his regular clothes and going out. The whole time he was home I was worried about him... you know... just because of the way things are and the way that they are treated. It's like it doesn't matter who you are. They see you as this Black person and automatically to me you're a target and that's not right but that just the way things have been. And so, I constantly worry. (Mrs. Aretha, Focus Group)</li> </ul>

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**Counterstorytelling**

- I am different from the little white lady with blond hair. Sometimes parents see a Black man and I have to remind them that I may look different but I still have all the same knowledge they have but because of my upbringing I am going to put a different spin on it. (Mr. Henry, Interview)
- Yes, but some of them can't relate to... White teachers can't relate to Black males. I mean I don't want to say struggle but their lifestyle is totally different and I don't think they can relate to what they have to deal with. (Mrs. Cherise, Focus Group)
- Every time I have seen him... here... out on field trips... whatever... It's just that projection of ... you know... everything that contradictory to whatever... I guess... the majority of the images you see in the media ... how Black men are portrayed. You know... just lazy, dress a certain way, talk a certain way... it's a contradiction in that sense. It allow you to see a Black man in a leadership role. It's this kinda Black guy they see in the class and they can take notes on how he represents. (Mr. Raton, Focus Group)

**The Commitment to Social Justice**

- Being a Black male, it's hard... kinda like the situation where most people wouldn't ask Black males question but shoot or other things can happen. I don't want [them] to be in a situation where they don't necessarily have the right to tell their story instead someone telling it for you [them]. (Mr. Javien, Interview)

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**Analyzing Black Male Teacher, Student and Family Member Data.** As I engaged in Protocol coding, I was able to look for specific codes for the tenets of the analytic tools including Black masculinity, fictive kinship networks, culturally relevant pedagogy, critical race theory. I searched for Afrocentric and deficit constructions of Black masculinity as described by Black male teachers, students, and family members.



For the notion of fictive kinship network, I searched for ways Black male kindergarten teachers foster collaboration, cooperation, and solidarity to improve the academic outcomes of Black male kindergarteners, advocate and support their nonacademic needs, and build resiliency in them, as described by themselves, Black male students and family members. Using culturally relevant pedagogy as an analytic tool, I searched among the themes to locate examples as described by Black male teachers, students, and family members pertaining to academic success, cultural competence, and critical awareness among Black male students. For CRT, I evaluated the data to locate ways the Black male teachers, students, and families spoke about the permanence of race and racism, intersectionality, the commitment to social justice, and engaged in counterstorytelling. Applying In vivo coding, I captured the actual words/sayings of the Black male kindergarten teachers, students, and family members from the semi-structured and unstructured interviews, classroom observations/field notes, and focus groups to describe the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers. Then, analyzing data from semi-structured and unstructured interviews, classroom observations/field notes, and focus groups, I used emotion coding to capture the emotions of the Black male teachers, students, and family members, as they described and expressed emotion regarding the identities and pedagogical styles of the Black male teachers. Finally, analyzing semi-structured and unstructured interviews, classroom observations and field notes, and focus groups, I engaged in descriptive coding to glean the in-depth opinions of Black male kindergarten teachers, students, and family members relative to the identities and pedagogical styles of the Black male teachers in this study. Moreover, I examined the data for patterns and emerging themes and created codes for each theme.

Specifically, for the focus groups with Black male kindergarteners and family members, I reviewed the extant literature on ways educational scholars have previously used focus groups with young children and adults. I engaged in a five-step process to better manage the focus groups (LeCompte, 2000). I first marked the focus groups with comments during each focus group session with the Black male students and family members. Second, I established and compiled initial sub-categories once I received the transcripts. Third, I identified frequencies and omissions for recurring themes. Fourth, I established and assembled initial themes. Finally, I re-established and re-assembled final themes. For the notion of fictive kinship network, I examined ways Black male kindergarteners and family members described ways Black male kindergarten teachers foster collaboration, cooperation, and solidarity to improve their academic outcomes, advocate and support their nonacademic needs, and build resiliency in them. Using culturally relevant pedagogy, I looked among the themes to locate examples of how they described the Black male teachers' contribution to academic success, cultural competence, and critical awareness. For CRT, I searched among the data to locate the permanence of race and racism, intersectionality, commitment to social justice, and counterstorytelling. I also mine the data to locate Afrocentric and deficit representations of Black masculinity. Engaging in In vivo coding, I used the focus group data to capture the actual words/sayings of the Black male kindergartners and family members as they described the identities and the pedagogical styles of the Black male kindergarten teachers. Drawing from the focus group data, I also engaged in emotion coding to capture the emotions of Black male kindergarteners and family members as they expressed their sentiments regarding the identities and pedagogical styles of the Black male kindergarten

teachers. Moreover, from the focus group data, I used descriptive coding to glean in-depth opinions from Black male kindergarteners and family members regarding the identities and pedagogical styles of the Black male kindergarten teachers. I examined the data for patterns and emerging themes and created codes for each theme.

**Constructing My Performative Representations.** After coding and analyzing the data based on the theoretical and analytic tools, I began to construct my performative representations in the form of dialogues. I used the actual words and emotions of my research participants and actual examples of scenarios that took place during the data collection process to construct the representations. Neither my research participants nor events that took place are composite characters or composite events. Whereas many critical race scholars/researchers (Cook, 2013; Cook & Dixon, 2013; Johnson, 2014) have constructed composite counterstories and have created composite characters to represent their research participants as performers, I decided against the use of these styles, because my research participants are not composite characters who are composed of two or more fictional or non-fictional individuals in this work (Cook, 2013), but they are real individual characters who contributed specifically to this study in their own unique way. While, at times, a research participant may have intersecting thoughts and/or articulations regarding a phenomenon as other participants in the study, I value the nuances in those thoughts and articulations. Achebe (2012) admonished best:

My position, therefore, is that we must hear all the stories. That would be the first thing. And by hearing all the stories we will find points of contact and communication, and the world story, the Great Story, will have a chance to develop. That's the only precaution I would suggest—that we not rule into

announcing the arrival of this international, the great world story, based simply on our knowledge of one or a few traditions (p. 60-61).

In other words, I see my research participants as individual wordsmiths working together to construct and/or create a collective story (Crenshaw, 1989). CRT scholars (Cook & Dixon, 2013; Crenshaw, 1989) suggest that individual stories and experiences make up and represent the collective experiences people of color may have. However, in notating this idea, it does not negate the importance of Black people's collective stories (Cook & Dixon, 2013; Grant et al., 2015).

Cook (2013) explained that using composite counterstories and composite characters is a way to protect those who are in politically vulnerable positions such as teachers. Although my research participants may be in politically vulnerable positions, I do not agree that the use of composite characters serves as a way to "protect" them because it is the ethical responsibility of all researchers to protect research participants regardless of their status, politically vulnerable or not (Patton, 2001). However, I agree that it can serve as an extra measure of protection for research participants.

### **Researcher's Positionality**

Patton (2002) argues that to engage in good qualitative research, researcher must invest time becoming a part of those who he/she researches. However, they must find ways to remain separate from them. Like Cook and Dixon (2013) acknowledge, Patton "fails to acknowledge that this [remaining separate from research participants] is not always a choice for some researchers. In reality, it never is a choice" (p. 1244).

As an emerging critical race and African-centered scholar, I stand between two I's (Peshkin, 1988). Peshkin (1988) described the I's as a subjectivity audit or the search for

the identities and positionalities one brings to research. There is the critical race “I” and the Black nationalist “I”. My critical race “I” acknowledges the permanence of race and racism and their impact on people of color while my Black nationalist “I” acknowledges the collective potential of a self-sustaining Black community. Therefore, these two I’s make up my multiple identities and inform my work as a Black male scholar who study Black male teachers. Said differently, I cannot deny that I am fully visible in this study. Hence, in the subsequent paragraphs, I unpack my visibility and/or each “I,” and how my personal and lived experiences shaped the development of the “I’s” I bring to this research study.

### **My Critical Race “I”**

Bell (1981) contends that race and racism are permanent factors in American society that negatively impacts the lives and lived experiences of people of color. My critical race “I” forces me to fully recognize the historical and contemporary racial oppression of Black people. My grandmother (and other family members) played a vital role in my acknowledgement of race and racism and the oppression of Black people in American society. As a young boy, I constantly heard her racialized narratives about how working for and being monetarily cheated by the “White man” negatively impacted her life. Therefore, I assume that like me, my research participants have had maternal and/or paternal figures in their lives who helped to shape their racial consciousness. Perry, Steele, and Hilliard (2003) documented the roles family and community members played in Black families and communities in the development of Black children’s racial consciousness. Similarly, my personal encounters and daily reminders including being called a nigger in school and hearing the sound of “Click! Click!” representative of car

doors locking as I walk the streets build on such racial consciousness. I speculate that my research participants have had similar racialized experiences in their personal lives.

Matias (2013) suggests that as people of color, we are not exempted from feeling the burden of Whiteness.

My critical race “I” also helps me to understand how racial oppression intersects with other forms of oppression (i.e., gender and class) to taint the experiences of people of color in American society. I am a Black male. I know all too well, like many others (Juarez & Hayes, 2014), what it means to be both Black and male in professional spaces. I assume that my research participants, who are all Black and male, will also know the consequences for being Black and male in professional spaces. Therefore, I speculate that during observations and interviews with my research participants, I became more of a participant-researcher instead of a participant-observer. Said more pointedly, I anticipate that my racialized and gendered experiences provide me a language with which I am able to talk to my research participants (who may have similar stories) about my tensions and triumphs as a Black male in education. I assume that my language is also their language because I make assumptions that we all sing the same song in a strange land. In other words, I assume because we are all descendants of enslaved Africans who were forced to a new land unfamiliar to them and were thrown in the bowels of a racialized hell, we know equally how it feels to be raced and gendered.

### **My Black Nationalist “I”**

My Black nationalist “I” believe in the potential and possibilities of the Black community to be self-sustaining through social, political, and economic means. Woodson (1933) acknowledged that Black people have the solutions to their own problems

concerning these aforementioned areas. Historically, Black people have been self-taught and self-helped (Anderson, 1988; Grant et al., 2015; Siddle-Walker, 1996; Williams, 2005). I also agree with Kelley as cited in the foreword of Watkins' (2001), *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954*, that

If we are to create new models of pedagogy and intellectual work and become architects of our own education, then we cannot simply repair the structures that have been passed down to us. We need to dismantle the old architecture so that we might begin anew (Watkins, 2001, p. xiii).

Therefore, I believe in the power and the possibility of self-sustaining Black schools where Black people are in charge, are developing solutions to the *underachievement* of Black children, and are utilizing culturally relevant pedagogical practices to encourage their academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Asante, 1988; King, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009). I see the role of Black male teachers (and administrators) as those who should lead the charge in this fight to develop, maintain, sustain Black schools and assist Black children. Hence, I speculate that if there were more Black male teachers who were prepared to possess similar beliefs, identities and pedagogical styles, we could ensure Black children are appropriately educated instead of miseducated or improperly educated about who they are as African people (Woodson, 1933). Miseducation is pervasive in Black communities, and often consists of a lack of knowledge and understanding of Black history and cultural contributions because these components are oftentimes disregarded and excluded from mainstream curricular in P-16 education (Perry et al., 2003; King, 2005; Woodson, 1933). As noted by Hilliard (2003), Black males (and females) can matriculate through educational institutions without

knowing the essence of Black excellence. While taking a pro-Black stance, it does not translate into anti-white or other racial and ethnic groups (Boutte, 2015; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Helms, 2008). Like Boutte (2015), my point is that [Black people], “like other groups, are a central part of humanity” (p. 14).

Although I believe in the power of self-sustaining Black schools and Black male teachers who take charge to develop and sustain them, I do acknowledge the complexity of school factors that may interfere with Black male teachers’ effectiveness of teaching Black students, particularly Black males. In other words, Black male teachers can possess culturally relevant identities and pedagogical styles to positively impact Black male students; however, Black boys are still victims of in-school and out-of-school inequities including the disproportional representation in school discipline and opportunity gaps that impact their academic and social plight in society writ large (Howard, 2014; Kunjufu, 2013).

My critical race “I” and Black nationalist “I” recognize that there are other social locations I bring to the research that could pose challenges from a research perspective. For example, although I have spent 14 years in education in several capacities including teacher, assistant principal, principal, and pre-service teacher educator, I have only spent a total of five years as an elementary and a high school teacher. I have had no prior experience as a kindergarten teacher, but have taken a genuine interest in learning more about Black male kindergarten teachers because I am a former student of one. In most cases, my research participants have spent more years as kindergarten teachers than I ever have or ever plan to. Therefore, as an “outsider” to the kindergarten classroom, I do not personally know the struggles, tensions and triumphs associated with being a Black male



kindergarten teacher. Hopefully, as I am a participant-researcher, I, too, can come to understand the daily challenges associated with being a Black male kindergarten teacher.

### **Trustworthiness**

According to Patton (2001), trustworthiness entails identifiable measures researchers use to ensure the validity and reliability of collected data. First, I continued to explore my positionality and the impact it has on this study on Black male teachers to guard against biases and assumptions during data collection. I used a reflective journal to make visible and to stay in tune with my biases, experiences, and presuppositions relative to Black males and Black male teachers and how these may affect my interpretations and the fidelity of the data. In other words, I made visible the “baggage” (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 698) I brought to the research. Ortlipp (2008) noted that using a reflective journal could help researchers examine their own assumptions, beliefs, and subjectivities to create transparency in the research process. Specifically, I reviewed my reflective journal during data analysis to critically self-reflect on and remain transparent throughout the research process. Moreover, in the introduction of this dissertation, I made it clear what my experiences were relative to Black male kindergarten teachers.

Then, I engaged in triangulation by drawing from a multiplicity of data sources to understand the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers. Triangulation is the application of more than one research approach to address qualitative research questions (Patton, 2001). Finally, I engaged in member checking. Member checking is a technique used in qualitative research to help increase the validity and reliability of the study (Patton, 2001). I allowed research participants to review transcripts of interviews to review for accuracy and ensure I capture correctly and accurately the essence of their

words (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I also allowed my research participants to review my interpretations of transcripts to determine what they thought about how I analyzed the data and captured their words, thoughts, and experiences. The research participants had a period of two weeks to engage in this process.

### **Limitations to the Study**

Considering the nature of counterstorytelling in that it moves away from traditional conceptions of research and is grounded in CRT as a new theoretical consideration, many scholars may critique the counterstories I have used to describe the constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers. Counter-storytelling is a part of the critical race theoretical movement and has always been a part of the African tradition. I perceive that not only scholars may critique the counterstories but the creative manner (i.e., dialogues) in which I constructed them may also be problematic and open itself up for both scrutiny and critique. Such scrutiny occurs largely in part because most scholars are not aware that historically Black scholars have always use creative ways to express research (Aldrige, 2003; Du Bois, 1933). Such scrutiny may be particularly true for scholars who explore Black male teachers, considering that few scholars have previously applied creative ways to engage in counter-storytelling regarding Black male teachers.

## **CHAPTER FIVE:**

### **OVERVIEW OF MAJOR THEMES AND FINDINGS**

Chapter Four provided the methodology and methods used to conduct this study. Therefore, Chapter Five outlines the overview of major themes and findings of this study. I start by re-introducing the purpose and the research questions for this study. I also provide a brief explanation of and rationale for my use of African-American Language (AAL) in which I will employ the presentation of the dialogues followed by the justification for the use of counterstories. I conclude with the rationale for the overview of the major themes and findings, the overview of the major themes and findings for this study, and the outline of remaining chapters.

#### **Re-Introduction of the Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to examine the identities, the ability to support Black male students' success, and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers who influence academic achievement outcomes among young Black males. To accomplish this goal, the following research questions are posed:

- 1.) How do Black male kindergarten teachers perceive and respond to predetermined positioning of Black male teachers as social change agents (i.e. role models and/or father figures)?
- 2.) What are the constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers who influence the academic achievement outcomes among Black males?

- 3.) How do Black male students perceive the identities, the ability to support their academic success, and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers?
- 4.) How do Black family members perceive the identities, the ability to support students' academic success, and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers?

### **Rationale for the Use of African-American Language**

As a researcher, I clearly understand that the research participants' responses are not articulated in what many individuals refer to as Standard English (SE) or the English Language that has been standardized by those in power (Hundley & Mallison, 2010). Delpit (2006) refers to SE as the 'language of power.' Therefore, I do not write their responses in SE. However, to value and validate the cultural and linguistic experiences of my research participants, I felt it necessary to embrace and preserve African American Language (AAL) (Boutte, 2015; Boutte & Johnson, 2013; Smitherman, 1999; Wheeler & Sword, 2006) frequently used by each research participant. Smitherman (1999) describes AAL as "a style of speaking English words with Black flava- with Africanized semantics, grammatical pronunciation, and rhetorical patterns" (p. 3). Rickford and Rickford (2000) terms AAL "the spoken soul" of Black people or the language that expresses the heart of Black people and their experiences in America. James Baldwin calls it "Negro English." Whatever it is and has been called, AAL has been passed on from one generation of speakers to another and is still widely used in Black communities (Smitherman, 1999).

More than 90 percent of Black people are AAL speakers, among which are those Black people who support and deny it (Hudley & Mallison, 2010; Smitherman, 1999). Historically, Black principals in segregated schools used AAL or what Siddle- Walker

(1997, 2003) refers to as the language of the community to communicate with parents. During the Oakland Ebonics debates of the mid-1990's, Reverend Jessie Jackson spoke against the Oakland Resolution to legitimize AAL as a language. Yet, Smitherman (1999) describes Jessie Jackson as one who masters the "Black word" because "his speeches reflect his rhetorical gift for moving the people using the language of the Black community" (p. 130). Alim and Smitherman (2010) also identify the Black spoken soul in the speech patterns of President Barack Obama, which they indicate played an essential role in his election and re-election as President of the United States.

Specific to the Lowcountry of the State is the Gullah language/dialect and culture (Smitherman, 1999). Gullah Language is notable in Black communities in the coastal regions of the Southeastern United States (Smitherman, 1999). Like AAL, many White scholars (Bennet, 1909; Mencken, 1936) negatively perceived Gullah Language as what Mencken calls as cited in Smitherman (1999) "Black slave language... the worst English in the world" (p. 9). However, scholars including Turner (1949) and Herskovits (1941) countered pathological assumptions of Gullah Language. Turner (1949), a Black scholar who studied African Languages, "demonstrated not only the African language background of Gullah speech but also laid the foundation to establish the linguistic connection between African languages and the speech of the millions of American Blacks who resided outside of the Gullah region" (p. 10). Presently, Gullah Language and culture are still revered in Black communities in the South and efforts are being made to preserve their historical contributions to American language (Hudley & Mallison, 2011).

While many scholars may view these languages as pathological (Smitherman, 1999), Black people, including the participants in this study, have the right to use their

own language to express themselves and to maintain a certain cultural connection that would not force them “to sacrifice their identities” (Williams, 2006, p. 346). This right should also be granted in educational research as a way to de-marginalize, yet center, the voices of those who have been historically marginalized (Solarzano & Yosso, 2002). Considering the current schooling context that seeks to nullify students’ of color cultural knowledge, Lee (2007) sees such integration of AAL as a way to engage Black and other students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds with discourses and repertoires familiar to them and their communities. In relations to Black people, and more specifically Black males, Kirkland (2011) sees using Black language as a way to work against a schooling system that is accustomed to penalizing Black males for speaking AAL. This penalization comes in the form of national reading and writing assessments that do not account for AAL and the variety of ways most Black males tend to speak (Kirkland, 2011).

As the researcher, I also found it convenient and appropriate to speak AAL and Gullah Geechee Language with the research participants as we communicated. I became like school principals in the South, during the era of de jure and de facto school segregation, who used the language of the community to identify with the Black parents and children they serve (Siddle-Walker, 2003). Siddle-Walker (2003) contends that school principals who did not to use the language of the community with Black children and families were thought of as “acting uppity” or unable to identify with those who belonged to the community. Because I naturally speak AAL and did not want to be perceived as “uppity” or unable to identify with my research participants, I used both AAL and Gullah Geechee Language to communicate with the participants in this study.

### **Rationale for the Use of Honorific**

While the use of African-American Language (AAL) is important to this study, the use of honorific is likewise important. According to Hudley and Mallison (2011), honorific includes titles of respect, which are essential components of AAL and Southern English. Given that the research participants in this study are speakers of AAL and are Southern, I use honorific to value both African-American and Southern heritage. Therefore, I refer to the teachers and family members in terms of Mr., Miss, or Mrs. Using these titles enable me to show honor and respect for Black mothers and fathers who are rarely respected and honored in society. I avoid using such titles for the young children represented in this study. Although I have an earned doctorate and am able to refer to myself as “Dr.,” I did not use this title because I wanted to remain connected to my research participants. Instead, I refer to myself as “Bryan” throughout the dialogues.

### **Justification for the Use of Counter-storytelling**

Many scholars (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007; Merriam, 1997; Yin, 2008) may argue that based on the methodological structure of each participants’ chapter, I could have used a case study methodology. I agree. However, it was my desire to remain consistent with my theoretical framework, which consists of Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory has its own research methodology, which includes counter-story-telling (Huber, 2008; Solórzano, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counter-storytelling is important to this study because there are some dominant, master narrative about Black men teachers that are pervasive in educational literature (Brown, 2012; Lynn, 2006a, b). That is, the role of the Black male teacher is solely constructed to serve as social change agent (i.e., father figures, coaches, disciplinarians) in response to distorted narratives about Black

boys and men in general (Brockenbrough, 2008; Brown, 2012). Thus, counter-storytelling is an appropriate methodology to challenges these pervasive, grand narratives about Black men, teachers, and boys.

### **Rationale for the Overview of Major Themes and Findings**

Because of the creative methodological ways in which I presented my findings, to avoid losing their essence, and to avoid readers' judgment and critique, I have decided to provide an overview of the findings of this study before I present them in such creative and performative style. I want to be clear. I am not apologizing for the methodological approach I use in this study. I am following the tradition of many Black scholars including Ida B. Wells and W.E. B. DuBois who desire to make their research accessible to marginalized communities (West & Buschendorf, 2014). Derrick Bell also engaged likewise (Taylor, 2005).

Taylor (2005) provides a description of Derrick Bell's creative, literary approach in such a way that suggests that "[j]ust as the New Testament parables should be read on the basis of the criteria of manifestation- the manifestation of new knowledge and insight- rather than on the basis of adequation- adequation to existing norms and knowledge – so I argue, should Bell's narratives. New Testament parables and Bell's parables both reorient, and they do so by disorienting" (p. 4). Therefore, similar to Cook (2008, 2013) and Cook and Dixon (2013) whose work demonstrated a creative literary approach (composite counterstorytelling) "to speak in such a way that reader's judgment and critique be temporarily delayed- or, disorienting," this creative literary approach purports to do likewise.



## **Overview of Major Themes and Findings**

Several major themes and finding are evident in this study on the constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers. Two themes were found regarding how Black male kindergarten teachers perceived their roles in response to the traditional positioning of Black male teacher. That is, Black male kindergarten teachers self-identify as fictive brothers/fathers. They also self-identify as fictive kin who foster collaboration and build solidarity with the Black community. There was one theme regarding how these Black male kindergartener teachers perceived their identities and pedagogical styles. In this study, Black men teachers perceived themselves to be pedagogues of culturally relevant classroom management practices to support Black male kindergarteners. Two themes were evident relative to how Black male kindergarteners perceived their Black male teachers. Black male kindergarteners perceived their teachers to be pedagogues of hip-hop, sports, and mathematics literacies as instructional approaches. Moreover, two themes were found regarding Black family members' perception of the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers. Black family members perceived Black male kindergarten teachers to be Role Models who represent positive images of Black manhood from dynamic and deficit perspectives. They also perceived Black male kindergarten teachers to be Role Models who minimize their distrust for White teachers and other educational professionals. A deeper synthesis and discussion of these major themes and findings will be presented in Chapter 9 of this study. I now provide a brief overview of the major themes and findings.

**Fictive Brothers/Fathers who understand their roles in the lives of Black male kindergarteners and draw from the Wisdom and Wealth of Black Communities**

To describe how Black male kindergarten teachers respond to the predetermined positioning of Black male teachers, Black male kindergarten teachers in this study self-identify as fictive brothers/fathers in the lives of Black male kindergarteners. Table 5.1 provides a brief overview of their fictive roles. Table 5.2 illustrates how Black male kindergarten teachers foster collaboration and build solidarity with the Black community to support Black male kindergartners in early childhood classrooms.

Table 5.1

*Black Male Kindergarten Teachers as Fictive Brothers/Fathers*

<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Fictive Role</i>	<i>Example</i>
<i>Mr. Javien</i>	<i>Fictive Brother</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It kinda hit me that as a Black male...it's almost like I am a big brother...an extension of their home and my responsibility is to teach and continue to remind you [referring to his Black male students] that you are a Black male and that's because society has given you a false image per se about what a Black man is.</li> </ul>
<i>Mr. Henry</i>	<i>Fictive Father</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You have to accept the fact that you are look upon as a role model or some father figure. I don't mind that. The kids just see something in you they like. Because plenty of time the children say 'Daddy or I mean Mr. Henry'...and the kids says 'I don't know why I keep calling you daddy' but I understand.</li> </ul>

<b>Mr. Tal</b>	<i>Fictive Father</i>	<p>* Well, someone who takes interest in the kids in such a way the kids can imitate and look up to them. A father figure who executes wisdom and uses that wisdom to guide children. He's also a coordinator of the minds...basically knowing how to bring all the stakeholders together to work with students.</p> <p>Someone who sees the best in you... the potential in you and build on that potential.</p>
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Table 5.2

*Black Male Kindergarten Teachers Foster Collaboration and Solidarity with Black Community*

<b>Fictive Brothers/ Fathers</b>	<b>Fostering Collaboration and Building Solidarity with the Black Community</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<b>Mr. Javien</b>	Mr. Javien draws from his biological parents' practices of debate and dialogue and his former Black teachers' wisdom and practices to support his Black male kindergarteners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I try to make it like a family where we come to the table and have discussion. That's how I was raised. We came to the table. We had family time. I would debate with my parents. Would I always win? No! That is why I encourage my students to have the opportunity to express themselves. (Mr. Javien, interview)</li> </ul>
<b>Mr. Henry</b>	Mr. Henry draws from the conception of care his parents taught him to support his Black male kindergarteners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Later on down the lines when I have your [their] siblings, I will be able to recall that information about you. It seems like</li> </ul>

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		<p>something basic but I think it goes a long way. You know my parents used to tell me about how important it is to get to know people...care for em [them]. You know...invest in em [them].</p>
<b>Mr. Tal</b>	Mr. Tal integrates instructional strategies into his kindergarten used by a former Black teacher who inspired him when he a student.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It (referring to Mrs. Hairfield's teaching) was always cohesive and I connected to it. Mrs. Hairfield taught Social Studies. Math and reading were my very strong areas but the way she taught Social Studies, it was very relevant. I learned a lot of Black history facts. It was ... It was something that I felt like I always wanted to know more about what she doing. It was something that applied me. I want my students to feel the same so they can say I impacted their lives in the same way. (Mr. Tal, interview)</li> </ul>

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### **Identities and Pedagogical Styles of Black Male Kindergarten Teachers**

In this study, Black male kindergarten teachers perceived themselves to be pedagogues of culturally relevant classroom management practices. Table 5.3 provides a brief overview of Black male kindergarten teachers as pedagogues of culturally relevant management.

Table 5.3

*Pedagogues of Culturally Relevant Classroom Management*

<i><b>Teacher</b></i>	<i><b>Culturally Relevant Classroom Management</b></i>	<i><b>Examples</b></i>
<i><b>Mr. Javien</b></i>	Mr. Javien calls Black family members to inform them of Black male students' behavior instead of sending them out of class. He also spends time talking to his Black male students to inform them of their behavioral responsibilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• So when I have a talk with you... hmm...it's because something just occurred and it's the first time and I want there to be an understanding what has taken place. But it can be positive or negative. You have to have it where the child understand and give the child an opportunity to ask questions and explain to him the good, the bad, the positive, the negative. (Mr. Javien, interview)</li> </ul>
<i><b>Mr. Henry</b></i>	Mr. Henry spends time talking to his Black male kindergarteners about their behavioral responsibilities instead of sending them out of the classroom,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ... I think having an opportunity to talk to kids and having an impact on them is better though. (Mr. Henry, interview)</li> </ul>
<i><b>Mr. Tal</b></i>	Mr. Tal utilizes his female teaching assistant to assist in behavioral management instead of sending his Black male students out of the classroom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. Tal encouraged Mrs. Peay to speak with Vance during his classroom interruption. She spoke with him and was able to calm him down. (Classroom Observation)</li> </ul>

**Black Male Kindergarteners' Perceptions of the Identities and the Pedagogical Styles of Black Male Kindergarten Teachers**

Concurrently, Black male students describe their Black male kindergarten teachers as pedagogues of hip-hop, sports, and mathematics literacies as instructional

approaches. Table 5.4 outlines Black male kindergarteners' as pedagogues of hip-hop, sports, and mathematics literacies.

Table 5.4

*Pedagogues of Hip-hop, Sports, and Mathematics Literacies*

<b>Pedagogues</b>	<b>Pedagogical Styles</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<b>Mr. Javien</b>	Black male kindergarteners perceive that Mr. Javien enables them to use hip-hop and sports as a literacy tool.	<p>*And we be readin about Michael Jordan sometimes. (Marquavious, Focus group)</p> <p>* Cause he always read the good books... You can listen to kinda like a rap. (Ameer, Focus group)</p>
<b>Mr. Henry</b>	Black male kindergarteners perceive that Mr. Henry encourages the use of hip-hop as a literacy instructional tool. They also perceive him as a pedagogue who uses sports to facilitate math instructions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It tells what a dog want and what you can give him. Like if you give a dog a bone, you gotta give him water. We can make a rap out of the words. Because the words rhyme. Just put the rhyming words together. He (referring to Mr. Henry) lets us listen to the CD. (Mario, Focus group)</li> <li>• Mr. Henry, you're really good at drawing basketballs. (<i>Mr. Henry was drawing basketballs to explain a math problem.</i>) (Joshua, Classroom Observation)</li> </ul>
<b>Mr. Tal</b>	Black male kindergarteners perceive Mr. Tal as a pedagogue who uses sports and hip-hop as literacy tool.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You can get a race car book. (Braden, Focus group)</li> </ul>

## Black Family Members' Perceptions of the Identities and Pedagogical Styles of Black Male Kindergarten Teacher

Finally, Black family members describe Black male kindergarten teachers as Role Models who serve who represent positive images of Black manhood for Black male kindergartners. They also perceive Black male kindergartners to be Role Models who minimize their distrust for White teachers and other educational professionals. Table 5.5 provides an overview of Black family members' perceptions of Black male kindergarten teachers as Role Models who represent positive images of Black manhood. Moreover, Table 5.6 illustrates Black male teachers as Role Models who minimize Black family members' distrust for White female teachers and other educational professionals.

Table 5.5

### *Role Models Who Represent Positive Images of Black Manhood*

Role Models	Perceptions of Black Male Kindergarten Teachers	Examples
Mr. Javien	Black family members perceive Mr. Javien to be a Role Model who represents positive images of Black men in order to teach Black boys to be "gentlemen" instead of "thugs."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mainly NFL players... now they got their hair dyed. I have seen one basketball player or a few like that so... so they follow and imitate what they see... so by having positive role models, they will imitate what they see. Yes, it's those images that they see. (Mrs. Cherise, interview)</li> <li>We need more young Black mens as role models so our younger crew can do better. (Mrs. Martha, interview)</li> </ul>

<b>Mr. Henry</b>	Black family members perceive Mr. Henry to be a Role Model who represents positive images of professional Black men.	...I thought it would be beneficial to see someone in a professional role, although his father is in the home. I needed him to see that there are male teachers and I wanted him to have that experience. As far as elementary school, there are not a whole lot of African American men teachers. So that was my biggest reason for wanting him as a teacher. (Mrs. Felice, Focus Group)
<b>Mr. Tal</b>	Black family members perceive Mr. Henry to be a Role Model who provides a positive image of Black manhood for Black boys.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He is always very professional. Every time I have seen him...here...out on field trips...whatever...It's just that projection of ...you know everything that contradictory to whatever... I guess...the majority of the images you see in the media ...how Black men are portrayed. (Mr. Raton, Focus Group)</li> </ul>

Table 5.6.

*Role Models Who Minimize Their distrust for White Teachers and Other Educational Professionals.*

<b>Role Model</b>	<b>Identities</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<b>Mr. Javien</b>	Mr. Javien serves as a Role Model who minimizes the distrust of Black family members who witnessed the mistreatment of Black boys in schools by White teachers and other educational professionals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baby, I'm getting to my point... I'm going back to white teachers...but hold on... Yes, I know...should have shot both of em at the altar. I got a brother. I love my brother to death. I told em don't bring them girls</li> </ul>



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<b>Mr. Henry</b>	Mr. Henry serves as a Role Model who minimizes the concerns of Black family members who saw White teachers engage in name discrimination relative to Black male students.	<p>to my house. I'm sorry. She did not want him until he got his little position. Any other time she didn't want him. So I don't really care for my son having a white teacher. (Martha, Focus Group)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers who don't look like him (referring to White teachers). Honestly I do...only because I've seen it...and they have not necessarily done it to him for two reasons. One because I'm there. Two because they know me. I hear them talking about boys who look like him before they even ... I mean just from looking at the class roster. I know it happens. That was one thing I didn't have to worry about with Mr. Henry. (Mrs. Felice, Focus Group)</li> </ul>
<b>Mr. Tal</b>	Mr. Tal serves as a Role Model who provides "relief" for Black family members who feel that White teachers do not understand Black culture and are easily willing to dismiss Black male students from classrooms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>But the moment I met him (Mr. Tal) and Mrs. Peay (teacher assistant) I was actually pretty relieved. More so in the sense that he understands the culture. Being able to relate to Braden and other students in the class, they would not be as readily or quick to write him up if he has a problem. (Mr. Raton, Focus Group)</li> </ul>

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### **Overview of Remaining Chapters**

These findings are represented in Chapters 6- 9 of the dissertation through counterstories. Chapter 6 presents counterstories with and about Mr. Javien followed by Chapter 7 that outlines counterstories with and about Mr. Henry. Chapter 8 focuses on counterstories with and about Mr. Tal, and Chapter 9 provides a synthesis of the major findings for this study. Finally, I conclude with Chapter 10, which includes the discussion, implications for policy and practice, recommendations for future study, and the conclusion sections.

## CHAPTER SIX

### COUNTER-STORYTELLING WITH AND ABOUT MR. JAVIEN

“Kindergarten teachers are so important because children will always remember them. I remember mine.” This comment made by Mrs. Cherise, one of the mothers of the Black male kindergarteners in Mr. Javien’s class, resonates with me. Like Mrs. Cherise, I remember my kindergarten teacher, and even more poignantly since he was a Black male.

Over 31 years ago, I had my first personal encounter with my teacher, Mr. C. Through much reflection on my early childhood experiences, a deepened understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy and a broader view of the identities and pedagogical styles of culturally relevant pedagogues, I surmised that Mr. C. was the epitome of a culturally relevant teacher. Mr. C. drew from the wealth of my community to teach me, and did not see either the community or me as “culturally deficient” unlike many Black children’s teachers (Boutte, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Specifically, he built bridges between what I had learned in my home, community, and school. His practices also motivated me and sparked a flame for learning that I maintain presently. For this reason among many others, I decided to pursue a second terminal degree—this time in Early Childhood Education. It is my belief that if children are afforded culturally relevant learning experiences, they can develop a similar flame for learning (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Like other culturally relevant teachers, Mr. C. saw potential in me and his other students—a potential we often did not see in ourselves (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009). He was concerned about his students' academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical awareness, though I did not have a name for these concepts as a young child. Importantly, he was a Role Model instead of a role model as I have defined these terms in the present study. He lived his life in the classroom and community in such a way that children who were not in his class admired him and wanted to be like him. They would often ask to be students in his class and would encourage their parents to request permission to do so.

In the present study, I found similar characteristics in Mr. Javien. Based on inductive theme analyses of interviews, focus groups, document analysis, and observations, seven themes were found regarding how Mr. Javien perceives his self-identity and pedagogical styles; two regarding how his Black male kindergarteners perceived him; and two regarding how Black family members perceived him:

### **Seven Major Themes Regarding Mr. Javien's Identities and Pedagogical Styles**

1. Mr. Javien self-identifies as a fictive brother/parent.
2. Mr. Javien is a fictive brother/parent who fosters collaboration and solidarity with his biological parents, former Black teachers, and college professors from whom he gains wisdom to academically support Black male (and female) students.
3. Mr. Javien also serves as fictive brother/parent who works to support Black male kindergarteners in non-academic ways beyond kindergarten classrooms.

4. He has high expectations for and builds resilience in his Black male kindergarteners.
5. He uplifts Black male students through positive affirmations.
6. Mr. Javien involves Black family members inside and outside of the classroom context.
7. He introduces and integrates Black music into the kindergarten classroom.

**Two Major Themes Regarding Mr. Javien’s Identities and Pedagogical Styles As Perceived by Black Male Kindergarteners**

8. Black male kindergarteners perceive Mr. Javien to use culturally relevant and Black masculine literacies to support them in kindergarten classrooms.
9. Black male kindergarteners perceive that Mr. Javien plays with and relates to them inside and outside of the classroom.

**Two Major Themes Regarding Mr. Javien’s Identities and Pedagogical Styles of Black Male Teachers as Perceived By Black Family Members**

10. Black family members perceive Mr. Javien to be a teacher who knows how to teach Black male students in a way that meets their individual needs.
11. They also perceive Mr. Javien to be a teacher who minimizes their distrust for White female teachers and other educational professionals.

To follow, I discuss each of the seven themes relative to Mr. Javien’s identities and pedagogical styles. I begin with the most dominant theme—Fictive Brother/Parent.

However, before I discuss the themes, I introduce Table 6.1, which is a brief excerpt of profiles regarding the Black male students and family members who Mr. Javien serves as kindergartener teacher.

Table 6. 1

*Profile of Black Male Kindergartners and Family Members*

<b>Names of Family Members</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Familial Role</b>	<b>Kindergartner</b>
<b>Mrs. Martha</b>	Black	Grandmother	Ameer
<b>Mrs. Cherise</b>	Black	Mother	Marquavious Demarcus

**Counter-Storytelling With Mr. Javien**

**Being a Fictive Brother/Parent**

Considering the following dialogue during which Mr. Javien describes his role and speaks about his perceptions of Black male teachers in general. We sat at the back of his classroom at a round table full of classroom supplies he would later use for upcoming lessons. In his thick Bahamian and Charleston dialect, he smiles and his eyes become brighter as he began to speak.

It kinda hit me that as a Black male, it's almost like I am a big brother...an extension of their home and my responsibility is to teach and continue to remind you [referring to his Black male students] that you are a Black male and that's because society has given you a false image per se about what a Black man is. It does have certain negative expectations for you. That's not who we are as Black men and that's not who we've ever been. So my thing is to let you know that.

Mr. Javien describes himself in terms of 'big brother' whose responsibility is to help Black male kindergartners understand the importance of viewing Black men from dynamic perspectives in light of the negative, stereotypical messages Black boys typically receive about Black men. At this juncture, Mr. Javien helps his Black male students develop what Ladson-Billings (1994/2009) refers to as sociopolitical

consciousness or the idea of helping Black children understand how they are positioned in the world as raced and gendered individuals. Such conversations are important because they are not typical in most classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 2009). In other words, most teachers are unaware of strategies to engage Black students in raced-centered and other socio-politically-related conversations (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Matias, 2013). Brown (2009) notes that one of the pedagogic performance styles of culturally relevant Black men teachers is that they use negotiator-style discussions to help Black male students come to new understandings about life. Although Mr. Javien sees his role from a dynamic perspective, he is not perceived by most of his parents in the same way. Consider the following dialogic exchange between Mrs. Martha and Mrs. Cherise during a focus group discussion:

**Bryan:** I've heard both of you talk about role models. How do you define a role model?

**Martha:** Take you for example...

**Cherise:** Positive!

**Martha:** You are not coming in here sagging...saying "Hey sista how you doing?"

**Cherise:** With gold grills in your mouth!

**Martha:** You [referring to other Black men] ask them to come ...they come in sneakers...NO! Maybe I'm from the old school but... you came in here to interview us today, you did not come in here with your britches saggin'.

Saying.... "Hey ladies how ya doing?"

**Cherise:** Mr. Javien, he comes and his clothes is on him...neat and put together...and like when Marquavious came to him for the summer he had like a

ringtone on his phone that went off... I think it was “Turn down for what?” He (Mr. Javien) say “Don’t get it twisted.” He is a schoolteacher but he is still a person.

**Martha:** Yes, he say I’m a teacher... I’m a man. I’m not here to be your friend but I can still help you.

**Cherise:** That is one thing he don’t do...he don’t treat them like he is their friend. He remains in control.

**Bryan:** Ok!

**Martha:** Even when they are on outings, he is still professional and in control...He is still Mr. Javien...No hey brotha! And role models like you... you can walk through the halls and see the boys going through there and you know at this stage you can tell who they following.

**Cherise:** Mainly NFL players... now they got their hair dyed. I have seen one basketball player or a few like that so... so they follow and imitate what they see... so by having positive role models, they will imitate what they see.

Yes, it’s those images that they see.

**Martha:** We need more young mens as role models so our younger crew can do better.

The conversation between Mrs. Martha and Mrs. Cherise demonstrate how they (like many people) have unknowingly internalized the racist beliefs about Black men in general and have constructed Black men teachers as those who are ‘positive’ role models to save Black boys from similar deficit images of Black men. However, their understanding of role models and the need for them is also rooted in deep concern for the



welfare of Black boys. Black boys and men are often stereotypically constructed as thugs, failures, and uninvolved fathers who are responsible for the demise of Black boys (Brown, 2012).

Although both Mrs. Martha and Mrs. Cherise play into this type of deficit thinking regarding Black boys and men (as is customary for many Black people including the President of the United States, President Barack Obama<sup>11</sup>), it is not my goal to blame them for such deficit thinking about Black men in general. Likewise, I have had similar thoughts. These ideas and beliefs are not surprising given the endemic nature of racism, and are perpetuated through media and other institutional forms and have become normalized in the American backdrop (Sealey-Ruiz & Green, 2015). It is a part of an intentional agenda to not only eradicate Black men, but also to uphold the vestiges of White Supremacy and racism. Woodson (1933) suggests that if White slave owners could control the bodies and minds of the enslaved African man, they could destroy the Black family. This same agenda continues presently.

At the time of this study, Black male youth and men in general were and are being gunned down in astronomical numbers at the hand of White police officers who claim and/or have claimed they felt threaten by the bodies of the Black males they victimized (Taylor, 2016). Cress-Welshing (1991) argues that White men have always been threaten by the melanin in the Black male body; thus, they continue to paint Black men in a negative light. She further asserts that because of such melanin, White men knew Black men had the potential to dominate the world and to hinder such domination, they aimed

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<sup>11</sup> President Barack Hussein Obama has referred to Black males in deficit terms including 'misguided,' 'criminals' and 'thugs' in several national addresses (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZ6xEZly8zk> ).

to destroy the Black male body. Black people often blame themselves for their own victimization without critique of the ways White Supremacy and racism negatively shape their lives (DuBois, 1903; Fanon, 1963; Cress-Welshing, 1991; Woodson, 1933/1990). Critical race theory explains how racism, and internalized racism work to maintain the permanence of race and racism in American society.

Paradoxically, while Mrs. Martha and Mrs. Cherise have internalized the negative images about Black men, they also seemingly imply that Black men teachers, who they deem as ‘positive’ role models’, are providing Black male kindergarteners’ skills as a way to prepare them for manhood. Martha implies that when Black male teachers work against the images of Black males “sagging their pants” and “wearing gold grills,” they are helping Black boys to “do better.” Martha further suggested that the reason she responded to me, as the researcher, in the way she did was because I also fit that image of the ‘positive role model’[whose] “britches weren’t sagging and who was not wearing sneakers.” She also asserted that my vernacular played an important role in the way she interacted with me. According to her, I was not saying “Hey ladies, how ya doing?” In other words, I was not using African American Language, which is also unfairly scrutinized among both Black and White people for being considered ‘broken English’ or ‘street language’ (Alim & Smitherman, 2012; Boutte, 2007; Boutte & Johnson, 2012, 2013; Smitherman, 1999; Woodson, 1933/1990). Sadly, many people disregard the beauty of Black language, which demonstrate Black ingenuity (Smitherman, 1999; Boutte, 2015). That is, it represents the historical construction and/or reconstruction of language in response to being denied access to it. It represents the struggle of how Black

people have overcome in a White, racist society that not only marginalized and oppressed them physically and mentally, but also linguistically (Perry et al., 2003; Williams, 2005).

I clearly understand and acknowledge Mrs. Martha's and Mrs. Cherise's desire to help their sons put their best foot forward, even while knowing that it may not always help. Black mothers (and fathers) are always concerned about their sons in such a way they encourage them to conform to White expectations instead of working against them (Coates, 2015). For them, it brings comfort in knowing their sons are safe, even, while they are still unsafe in so many ways (Coates, 2015). My mother and grandmother often told me what to wear and how to wear it, as a way to 'protect' me.

Coates (2015) provides a counternarrative to the deficit narratives about the way Black men dress. He contends that the urban dress, styles, and representations of Black men in communities and homes demonstrate the fight for their bodies and acts of their survival in a White Supremacist society that is determined to destroy their bodies. However, what neither Mrs. Martha nor Mrs. Cherise stated was that when Black men dress in Eurocentric ways, their bodies are still not protected (Coates, 2015). I can also attest to this. I have also 'dressed to impress' and was still called a nigger. Both Dr. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X wore suits and ties, yet, they were still victims of White supremacy and racism. In other words, the politics of respectability do not save Black men from ways White Supremacy and racism manifest themselves in American society. Thus embracing Ladson-Billings' (2009) concept of sociopolitical consciousness can help Black boy and families understand the role race and racism play in shaping their lives in schools and society writ large. Regardless of Mr. Javien's and my style of dress, we are still subjected to what it means to be Black and male. That is, even as we are

viewed as positive Role Models, we are still stereotypically considered ‘thugs’ by some White (and Black) people (Ladson-Billings, 2011). In other words, I invoke the words and the African-American Language of conscious hip-hop artist Kanye West who suggests in his song *New Slave* that there is nowhere in America ‘a nigga’ is safe (West, 2012).

Discussing issues relative to sagging pants, grills, and African-American vernacular are very complex issues and generate heated debates and discussions among the Black community (Cosby & Poussant, 2007; Perry & Delpit, 1998). Such discourses often reify DuBois’ (1903) conception of ‘double consciousness’ or the idea that Black people live in two worlds: a Black world and an American world. Some Black people contend that such ways of dressing and speaking often limit opportunities and upward mobility for Black men (Cosby & Poussant, 2007); whereas other people think otherwise (King, 2011). Joyce King (2011) reminds us as we attempt to engage in what she calls “critical studyin for human freedom” (p. 343) that during Hurricane Katrina, some Black men, who wore sagging pants, were responsible for saving the lives of many drowning victims. In other words, King (2011) contends that we should be careful how we judge, and see the humanity of Black men who may say their pants.

On another note, to further demonstrate that Mr. Javien does not perceive himself as responding to deficit perspectives relative to Black children and families, which is contrary to what most teachers in K-12 schools think about Black people (Souto-Manning, 2013), he notes:

I feel like I’m a parent per se and my responsibility is to continue to mold you [referring to students]...not taking away from the actual parent but between eight

o'clock and three o'clock, you're my child and responsibility. So like any good parent, you want your child to do certain things so they can be productive. But anybody can want them to be productive... I mean I guess I wanna say that anybody can support Black males, not only Black male teachers. I think you gotta want to work with them so I'm not necessarily saying that you gotta be a Black male to teach and support Black boys per se.

Stereotypically, most Black male teachers are typically called to classrooms across grade levels to take on the role of neglecting Black fathers or to help single Black mothers to raise sons (Brown, 2011). However, such is not the case for Mr. Javien. He perceives himself to be an extension of the home of his Black male kindergarteners. Cook (2010) describes educators who serve as extended parents as being a part of a fictive kinship network. In other words, they are members who are a valuable part of the wealth of human resources that exists in Black communities (Cook, 2010). Drawing from Fordham's (1996) notion of fictive kinship, Cook explains it as a bi-directional social and economic relationship established and enjoyed by individuals who have neither consanguine nor affinal ties. These ties, instead, are fictive (Fordham, 1996; Cook, 2010). Following this same line of reasoning, Mr. Javien describes himself in terms of fictive brother/parent in the lives of his Black male students because of the ties he has with them. He also spoke about experiencing these ties as a young child, growing up in his community. He relates,

We all are brothers and sisters. You know and you probably heard this too since we're from the same area... you know... Back in the day, I would hear my parents talk about everybody was responsible for raising children in the

community when they were growing up. And I could remember my neighbor was like this too cause [because] if I did something in the streets, somebody was going to call my father and tell him what I did. So your brother, father, mother and sister could be two doors down from where you live per se because everybody took care of everybody and we kinda got away from that concept but we need to go back to that.

Drawing from his experience as a young child where he perceived everyone responsible for raising children, he sees the importance of such role in his work as a kindergarten teacher. Cook (2010) extends the idea that Black teachers who are fictive kin foster collaboration with other Black teachers in urban schools to support the academic and social needs of Black children. However, building on her work, my work demonstrates ways Black teachers foster collaboration and build solidarity with family members to support Black students in K-12. I further discuss this idea of fostering collaboration and building solidarity in the next section of this analysis.

While perceiving himself as an extension of the home of his Black male students, he perceives how dynamic Black fathers (and mothers) are. Afrocentric constructions of Black masculinity helps people to see Black fathers (and mothers) as empowered to take on active roles to uplift their homes and communities (Jones, 2003). These are not the typical expectations for Black men and fathers. Instead, they are stereotypically seen as taking less active roles in the lives of Black boys (and girls) (Brown, 2011), despite research studies (CDC, 2015; Coles & Green, 2009) that suggest otherwise.

Viewing Mr. Javien's perception of his role in the lives of his Black male kindergarteners through the lens of critical race theory makes apparent the power of

counter-storytelling as a way to challenge dominant ideologies about people of color, Black men in this case. While some people (including Black people) view Black fathers (and mothers) in deficit ways (Cosby & Poussaint, 2007; Frazier, 1948), Mr. Javien works against such ideas as he works to exhort them, instead of tearing them down as he suggests he is not taking anything from “their actual parents.” Instead, Mr. Javien views his role as complementary to that of the roles of the parents. From the perspective of fictive kinship, a sense of communal connection is evident. Similarly, it is also important to view such idea from an Afrocentric perspective. The African principal of Ubuntu or the idea of “I am because we are” also helps to explain this communal connection (Boutte, et al., 2011; Bryan et al., 2016).

Moreover, using Critical Race Theory to explain Mr. Javien’s self-ascription of Role Model in the lives of his Black male students is an important idea to consider. Often, this role has been defined and constructed for Black male teachers before they enter classrooms to work with children, regardless of grade levels in which they work (Brown, 2012). In other words, Black male teachers take on the role model position without the ability to name and define it for themselves (Brown, 2012). This is similar to the idea that White people have always ascribed names to Black people, from ‘slaves’ to ‘niggers’ (Coates, 2015; X & Haley, 1964). However, to continue to draw from CRT, it also becomes essential to understand the importance for Black men teachers to name their own realities (Lynn & Jennings, 2009). CRT scholars (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) assert that dominant narratives regarding Black (and other people of color) continue the legacy of silencing them and/or discrediting their narratives and/or accounts about the ‘who’[emphasis added], ‘what,’ ‘when,’ ‘where,’ and ‘how’ in relations to their lived

experiences. Historically, the role of Black male teachers have always been couched in the idea of social change agents in the form of role models, father figures, coaches, and disciplinarians in response to deficit understandings about Black boys and men (Brown, 2012). To further draw from Critical Race Theory, counterstorytelling was evident of Mr. Javien's identities and pedagogies in his kindergarten classroom. Black male teachers, like Black teachers in general, have been largely understudied and undertheorized in historical and contemporary teacher education research, unless they have been constructed to 'save Black boys' (Brown, 2012). In fact, most of the early literature surrounding Black male teachers emphasize such ideas (Brown & Butty, 1999). Recently, calls for Black male teachers to early childhood classroom are growing to 'save' Black boys therein (Bryan & Browder, 2013). Thus, this idea alienates their culturally relevant identities and pedagogical styles that can support Black males (and females) in early childhood classrooms. Having Mr. Javien name his own realities and construct his own perceptions of his roles in such a fashion serves to counter master narratives and provide a broader vision for Black male teachers in general, while also serving as an act of social justice for them and Black boys. I further explore ways Mr. Javien demonstrates fictive kinship through his identities and pedagogical styles in the next section.

Although she views Mr. Javien's role in response to deficit perspective regarding Black boys and men, Mrs. Cherise still understands the fictive role Mr. Javien plays in her son, Marquavious' life to such a degree she does not want it to end. During the focus group discussion, Mrs. Cherise poignantly lays it out:

Hopefully, next year, if he is still here or not, hopefully ... I want him (referring to her son) to stay in contact with him more throughout his whole school [career]



because to me he is a positive role model and things he may be lacking in or maybe things he want to talk to someone else about maybe he can go to him and keep that connection.

Mr. Cherise's statement not only represents the power of fictive kinship network that extend beyond classroom walls, but also illustrates that even when Black family member have deficit perspectives regarding the role of Black men teacher, they still acknowledge the fictive kinship networks that exist between Black male teachers and their sons. While studies have explored the fictive kinship networks of Black children in schools (Cook, 2010; Fordham, 1996), unclear in the literature are the perceptions Black family members may have regarding that role. In the next section, I describe ways Mr. Javien fosters collaboration and solidarity with the Black community.

### **Fostering Collaboration and Solidarity**

A deeper examination of Mr. Javien's role as a teacher demonstrates his dynamic view of both Black familial relationships and Black educational communities, with which he fosters collaboration and solidarity by drawing on their wisdom to support his Black male kindergarteners. As indicated in the following dialogue, he describes how he uses words of wisdom and practices, which his biological parents used to support him during his childhood years. He speaks about how he uses these practices to support Black male kindergarteners as he continues the conversation at the round table in his classroom:

I can't speak for all kindergarten classrooms but for my class I have a structured environment but I allow flexibility. I also believe that you should be... flexible creating an environment where he wants to learn. I tell my students this is a family. I will defend and protect you. I am going to back you up but you have a

part to play too. So it's more like a family-oriented classroom for me. I make my Black male students responsible for themselves and everybody else. I also try to make them independent.

It is evident that Mr. Javien has put in a lot of forethought regarding strategies for accomplishing a community in his classroom. He explains:

For example, I let them take the role of the teacher and I let them teach when they understand something that their classmates may not. I incorporate the students into the classroom instead of me being the teacher saying this is my class. Yes, it's our class. I try to make it like a family where we come to the table and have discussion. That's how I was raised. We came to the table. We had family time. I would debate with my parents. Would I always win? No! That is why I encourage my students to have the opportunity to express themselves. In some classrooms, some teachers don't necessarily do that but say, 'This is my class and you have to do what I say.' Then the child doesn't feel like he is at liberty to express himself. When I teach new ideas, I use this same approach... you know... I try to let them talk and use things they may already know... maybe they have tried it at home or somewhere else to help them understand what I'm trying to get across.

Seamlessly, Mr. Javien's practices serve as counters to deficit narratives about Black teachers and Black families. He astutely applies values regarding voice and dialogue that he internalized as a child engaging in debate with his parents. In fact, when asked about who inspired him to become a teacher, Mr. Javien suggested during one of the interviews in his classroom that it was a dialogue with his mother who asked if he were interested in teaching. He explained that he was a senior in college. He returned home to visit his

mother and to ask her for some money. She asked him if he wanted to be a substitute teacher at her school. According to Mr. Javien, his mother is a media specialist at an elementary school in the Lowcountry. He was reluctant at first but later considered the offer. He said it was this professional educational opportunity that sparked his interest in teaching. He notes that typical in most classrooms is the lack of opportunities for Black male students to express themselves, which leads to making them not feel a part of the learning process.

Mr. Javien contends that one of the advantages of being a Black male teacher is that he can have crucial conversations about being Black and male with Black boys that other people may not be able to have. For example, during several observations Mr. Javien spoke to his Black male students about his personal struggles in school and how he overcame them, which provides an example to his Black male students regarding how to be resilient in the face of oppositions. He relates,

No one ever told me I was going to be a kindergarten teacher. No one ever told me I was going to be doing a Master's (degree). I had struggles in school so if I can do it, and I had struggles, I tell them you can too. So if Mr. Javien wasn't the best reader or speller and he did it, you can do it too.

During another observation, with a smaller group of Black boys, Mr. Javien spoke about being discriminated against in his predominantly White neighbor. This discussion stemmed from another discussion relative to treating people fairly. Mr. Javien relayed that on one occasion, he was on his way home. He noticed an older, White lady who was driving in front of him, pulled over in order to drive behind him, which enabled her to follow him. She followed him until he arrived in front of his house. Once he was parked,

he noticed that she continued to stare at him and that she had noticed the residential tag on his car, which alerted her that he was a resident in that community. The group of young males seemingly was intrigued by his story. However, Mr. Javien shared it in order to help them understand that the world is not fair and that people will judge them based on the color of their skin. He suggests that he can have these kinds of conversations with his Black male kindergarteners, because in most cases, they share similar backgrounds. Lynn (2006a, b) contends that culturally relevant Black men teachers are able to help Black males (and other students) understand the consequences of being raced because they also carry the misfortune of being raced.

He also sees such flexibility in conversation as a way to teach Black male students to activate their voices in his classroom and beyond it because he “[doesn’t] want [them to be in a situation where they don’t necessarily have the right to tell their story instead someone telling it for you [referring to his Black male students],” which often happens in schools and society where Black male voices are often silenced and/or unheard. In particular, Mrs. Martha also notices the flexibility in conversation that Mr. Javien allows. She relays that her grandson, Ameer, was anti-social prior to his enrollment in Mr. Javien’s kindergarten class. She notes that being anti-social is a part of having Asperger’s Syndrome. She further extends the idea that Ameer is so talkative now that he “doesn’t know when to shut up.” She says, “Mr. Javien has done too good of a job with mine [referring to her grandson].” She also acknowledges that one of the characteristics she like about Mr. Javien is that he encourages his Black male students to talk and “he tells them you are not going to bow your head and cover your mouth...talk to me.” Mrs. Cherise concurs, “Mine too...he won’t be quiet!”

I concur with Mr. Javien when he suggests that Black male students are silenced in societal spaces (Ladson-Billings, 2011). Such silencing often occurs in schools where their bodies are disciplined and controlled (Ladson-Billings, 2011). Therefore, to provide counter-hegemonic opportunities for Black males in kindergarten classrooms, Mr. Javien feels the need to allow his Black male kindergartners to be flexible and to voice their opinions.

In another study, my colleagues and I explore the administrative practices of Mrs. Cecelia Rogers, a principal at Charleston Development Academy in Charleston, S.C. One of her administrative strategies consisted of her changing the curriculum and schooling practices to support the voices of Black children (Bryan et al., 2016). She insisted that Black children are often inundated with so many voices that they rarely have opportunities to hear their own, which ultimately impacts how they perform in K-12 schools. Black children including male students are a part of the Black community where orality and storytelling are important cultural components (Boykin, 1994). Several scholars (Boutte, 2015; Boykins, 1994; Hale, 2001; King, 2005) contend that three of the dimensions of the Black cultural experience include communalism/collectivity, expressive individualism, and oral tradition. Communalism/collectivity is a “commitment to social connectedness, which includes an awareness that social bonds and responsibilities transcend individual privilege” (Boutte, 2015, p. 19). Expressive individualism is “the cultivation of a distinctive personality and proclivity for spontaneous, genuine personal expression” (Boutte, 2015, p. 19). Mr. Javien cultivates such genuine personal expression in his classroom as previously illustrated; however he encourages it other ways. On one occasion, a Black male student, Joseph, told Mr. Javien

in a direct manner that he needed to use a different marker to write on the board because the one he was using was not working. Mr. Javien looked at me and jokingly said with a smile on his face, “You see, these little people can get grown.” He was not offended by such comments. Oral tradition consists of “strengths in oral/aural modes of communication, in which both speaking and listening are performances, and cultivation of oral virtuosity” (Boutte, 2015, p. 19). Thus, having Mr. Javien who supports flexible and open communication in his kindergarten classroom is a surefire way to have both positive academic and social outcomes as it draws from the cultural traditions of Black children and their communities (Boutte, 2015; Boykin, 1994).

Because Mr. Javien also proposes that he uses these conversations as opportunities to express the complexities of being both Black and male, he helps Black male kindergarteners build sociopolitical consciousness in kindergarten classrooms. Ladson-Billings (2009) contends that a major tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy is the conception of sociopolitical consciousness or the idea of helping Black students to understand how they are positioned in a racialized, classist, and sexist society. Theories of Afrocentric constructions of Black masculinity also help Black boys come to such critical and dynamic understandings (Lynn et al., 1999; Lynn, 2006a, b). Because most teachers do not engage in culturally relevant pedagogy in K-12 classrooms (Boutte, 2015), Black children, male kindergarteners in this case, often do not have opportunities to develop sociopolitical consciousness in early childhood classrooms, thus producing a populous of students who leave kindergarten classrooms miseducated (Woodson, 1933). Boutte et al. (2011) acknowledge the importance of such conversations with all young children to help them move beyond colorblindness in early childhood classrooms.

Drawing from Cook's (2010) conception of fictive kinship networks where Black teachers foster collaboration, cooperation, and solidarity with other Black teachers to support each other and Black students in urban schools, Mr. Javien extends the idea of fostering collaboration, cooperation, and solidarity to include his own Black parents by drawing from their wisdom and practices to support Black males in kindergarten classroom. Rarely have research studies focused on ways Black teachers utilize the wisdom and practices they glean from their family members to support Black children in classrooms. Particularly this is true for Black male teachers who are often under-theorized in education research studies. Indeed, rarely is the wealth and wisdom of the Black community used to support Black children in K-12 schools (Boutte & Hill, 2006; King, 2005). Instead, schools support and uphold White dominant cultural norms, even with Black children in K-12 schools (Boutte, 2015; King, 2005). Using these dominant cultural norms to teach Black children in schools have proven damaging to the collective schooling experiences of Black children (Boutte, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009); thus, the reason some scholars explain academic gaps between Black and White students as an opportunity versus *achievement* gap (Milner, 2010b, 2015). For example, Milner (2010a, b) describes opportunity gaps in terms of advantages including better access to health care, housing, schools, and qualified teachers (to list a few) most White children have at the expense of children of color. The achievement gap is used to compare the differences in academic scores between Black students and their White counterparts (Anderson, 1988; Milner, 2010b). Therefore, my study builds on research studies which explore ways Black (and White) teachers draw from the wealth, wisdom, and practices of the Black (educational) community, particularly in the form of human capital, to support

Black children in K-12 schools. While Dingus (2006) focused on ways that Black teachers in segregated schools drew from the human capital and wisdom from Black communities and epistemologies, Mr. Javien's explicit commentary regarding drawing insights from his parents adds an important dimension to the existing body of knowledge.

Mr. Javien also fostered collaboration and solidarity with former Black teachers and college professors, applying ways they used to support him as a young child and an adult. Explaining his inspiration to become a teacher, Mr. Javien recalled the influence of some of his own teachers and instructors:

I was fortunate to have great teachers. I was a student who somewhat struggled in some aspects. I was a B or A/B student. As you mentioned earlier, my dialect or speech was a struggle for me at times. And I did not necessarily push myself like I should have pushed myself in most cases. From elementary school, I had a teacher name Mrs. Carr. That may have been my first African American teacher. I don't remember her teaching style ... I can't recall what we did day-to-day but I remember being impressed by her. Then, I had Mrs. Baxter and then in fifth grade I had this teacher Mrs. Harry... and she...this love she had for students gave me the opportunity during Hurricane Hugo to go to Japan to be an ambassador for our school which was in partnership with the City of Chucktownville (pseudonym). In middle school, I had Mrs. Grant, and Mrs. Cookman, and Mr. Hayes. So it was just these different people. In high school, there was Mr. Bennett, Mrs. Snowden... I had some old school Black teachers too. Mrs. B... I can't remember her name but I had a Mrs. Jones...but just teachers who just cared about you as a



student. I guess who sought me out to make sure I did what I needed to do and push me in that regards.

Mr. Javien also recalls his teachers having high expectations for their students. He suggests:

So there were expectations of you. And I also think it was dependent on who you were. They had high expectation for all students but they also know what high expectations meant for each student. It may have been more or less for each individual. I can remember some of them calling my parents to tell them I could have done a lot better and that I was doing the bare minimum. So I have high expectations. You [referring to his students] may not reach them the way I want you to reach them or at the time I want you to reach them (referring to expectations) but you're going to reach them or you're going to attempt to reach them. And when you're attempting to reach them, I'll meet you half way. If you can do your personal best, I'm fine with that per se.

Similarly, he found support from Black college professor who worked at the HBCU he attended. He perceived them as helping him through his college years to ensure he graduated on time. Seamlessly, he integrates such support and high expectations into his kindergarten classroom to ensure his Black males (and other students) meet both academic and social goals. I will speak about how Mr. Javien has high expectations later in another section of this chapter. Moreover, most of the literature on fictive kinship networks has focused on K-12 educators (Cook, 2010; Fordham, 1996). Therefore, scholars rarely demonstrate ways Black college professors serve as fictive kin to Black collegians at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (and Predominantly

White Institutions) (PWIs). More educational scholarship is needed to explore this phenomenon, particularly in light of Black collegians, particularly males, who are least likely in most cases to graduate from college or university (Cuyjey & Associates, 2006; Harper & Associates, 2014). In addition, scholars have under-theorized Black (and other) professors at HBCUs, who draw from culturally relevant identities, pedagogies, epistemologies, and paradigms to support Black collegians. This research exploration is important to the extant literature, because, according to DuBois (1903) and Coates (2015), most professors at HBCUs depend on Eurocentric ideologies and paradigms to educate Black collegians. In other words, culturally relevant identities and pedagogies are often on the outskirts of HBCUs (DuBois, 1903; Harper & Associates, 2014).

In describing his role as fictive kin who fosters collaboration with the Black familial and Black educational community, some critical scholars may find Mr. Javien's use of the word "I" or what I call 'the individual I' in direct contrast to his explanation of a family-oriented classroom. However, Matias (2013) suggests that in communities of color, it is impossible to detach the "I" from the "we." In other words, Black people are so interconnected that it is nearly impossible to hear an individual's story without hearing one's own story. Moreover, based on my observation data, it is clear that as he enacts these practices collectively with his students, he fosters collaboration and solidarity with his Black male (and other) students. Consider the following observational notes, which provides a description of Mr. Javien's classroom and the student-on-student interactions in his classroom. These following notes were taken during the first few days of observation from the back of Mr. Javien's classroom:

Mr. Javien's classroom is not set up like a traditional classroom where individual student desks are spread throughout the classroom. However, individual desks are set up as community pods where students can interact and communicate with one another. In fact, I see how some of his Black male students are working with other Black male students doing an activity where they seemed to be adding and subtracting. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Javien called several students to the board to demonstrate their knowledge, basically explaining how they arrived at the answer to the addition or subtraction problems on which they were working. Three Black females students went to the board before the last three Black male students had an opportunity to do the same. All of the students were successful at explaining how they arrived at their answers.

Although most kindergarten are structured in a collaborative manner, Mr. Javien's insistence on encouraging his students to collaborate on assignments and other activities is rare. In fact, the way he encourages his students to go to the board to share responses to math problems is also a rarity in early childhood classrooms. While early childhood classroom are constructed in collaborative ways, they still encourage young children to operate as individuals, instead of collaborative groups. Moreover, most early childhood scholars may see such 'old school Black teaching' practices as antithetical to 'developmentally appropriate practice' or practices based on child development theories and individual strengths and needs of children (Bredekamp, 1987, 1997; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). However, many critical early childhood scholars and reconceptualists (Boutte, 2015; Cannella, 1997; Cannella, 2014; Swadener & Mutua, 2006; Volk & Long, 2005) have challenged such practices in order to dismantle the 'universality' of the early

childhood classroom. Because ‘developmentally appropriate practice’ is not a consideration in this study, it is important to note that Mr. Javien’s practices are grounded in ‘old school Black teaching practices’ or practices Black teachers used to build Black children’s academic skills in segregated Black schools in the South (Jipson, 1991; Siddle-Walker, 1996). This idea could possibly explain the contentious relationship between him and his female principal. During a conversation relative to challenges associated with being a Black male teacher, Mr. Javien spoke about his principal. According to him, she often criticizes his teaching practices for not fitting within her and district guidelines and expectations. Such criticism comes despite Mr. Javien’s success with his students. Mr. Javien was recognized as being the only kindergarten teachers who has 94 percent of his male and female students reading at or above district and state-level expectations as indicated by Measures of Academic Progress (MAP). Although Ladson-Billings (2009) does not limit academic success to test scores, it is important to note that in a neoliberal educational context, teachers must be able to demonstrate student proficiency through test scores (Aronson & Laughter, 2015). Aronson and Laughter (2015) contends that such emphasis on testing comes as an attack against culturally relevant/responsive pedagogies in K-12 classroom. To further demonstrate Mr. Javien’s success with students, while continuing to discuss the challenges associated with being a Black male teacher, he notes that often his colleagues who work in higher elementary grades comment about how well his students are able to read when they move on to the next level in school. Ladson-Billings (2009) asserts that culturally relevant pedagogues should prepare students to become life-long learners who are able to demonstrate academic skills beyond the school and classroom community.

During several observations and informal conversations in his classroom or in the hallway, Mr. Javien also mentioned that his principal has invoked conflicts with him on several occasions. He proposed that on one occasion, she granted him permission to attend the state's early childhood conference. The principal sent the female assistant principal to the conference to verify his attendance at the conference. Mr. Javien insisted that she did not have a reason to verify his attendance. On the second day of the conference, he decided to arrive late because he did not want to attend the opening session. The assistant principal reported to the principal that he was late. According to Mr. Javien, the principal threatened to "write him up" for being late. When he returned to school the next day, she met with Mr. Javien to ask about his tardiness during the conference. He explained that he did not want to attend the conference's opening session and that he arrived in time for his first conference session. She insisted that he needed to arrive on time at conferences in the same manner he arrives to school on time. She opted against "writing him up." Mr. Javien often said that because of his relationship with his female principal, he wished his former male principal were still in charge of the school. It is important to note that Brockenbrough (2011) has explored the gender power dynamics between culturally relevant Black male teachers and female principals. He suggests that Black male teachers often engage in conflictual relationships with female administrators because of their inability to examine the male privilege they bring to female-dominant spaces including schools. Brockenbrough notes that during such gender-power struggles, these Black men suggest that they prefer to have male leaders instead of female leaders.

During an informal conversation in the hallway, Mr. Javien spoke about his classroom arrangement and about why the students were encouraged to interact with each

other in ways they did. During our conversation while he was giving me a tour of the school, he wanted me to meet one of the student interns who attended the university where I am employed at the time of the study. As we peeped through windows in search of the intern, he explained:

Personally I don't care for desk. I like the collaboration because I feel that...I feel like it's a buddy system, which would require you to seek assistance or support from your classmates. It holds you accountable...or accountability. For example, if a student missed my instruction, the rule is you ask you neighbor... what the instructions were or if you ask me I will tell you to ask your neighbor. If you need to borrow supplies like scissors or glue or need help studying a word, you ask them and then if they can't help I will assist. They like that because they feel like they take on responsibility.

While Mr. Javien facilitates a family-oriented, student-centered classroom where he fosters collaboration and solidarity with his Black male (and female) students, he blends his students together to create a winning team. Ladson-Billings (2009) describes culturally relevant teachers, who foster such blending in classrooms as coaches.

According to Ladson-Billings (2009),

Coaches understand that the goal is team success. They know that they do not need to gain personal recognition in order to achieve that success.

However, they do need a sense of how to create a winning team. Coaches are comfortable operating behind the scenes and on the sidelines (p. 27).

While suggesting that Mr. Javien is a culturally relevant pedagogue who operates as a coach, it is also important to examine this idea from a fictive kinship network

perspective. It is clear that Mr. Javien not only fosters collaboration and solidarity with his biological family and the Black education community, but also fosters collaboration and solidarity with his Black male (and female) students. In her work, Cook (2010) demonstrates how Black teachers who are fictive kin foster collaboration and solidarity with Black students in secondary schools to support their own learning. My work builds on Cook's by examining how a Black male teacher fosters collaboration and solidarity with his Black male students in an early childhood setting. In the next section, I discuss how Mr. Javien support his Black male students in non-academic ways.

### **Supporting Black Male Kindergarteners in Non-Academic Ways**

While speaking about reasons regarding why his Black male students are successful; whereas, other may not be successful in kindergarten classrooms, Mr. Javien spoke about ways he supports their non-academic needs. However, he first explained the importance of investing in the child and developing important relationship with parents to deepen relationships with children inside and outside of the classroom. He relates during a conversation at the round table at the back of his classroom.

You have to take a little more time to invest in who the child is in your class and what's going on in his personal life...and make that connection. Some are successful and some are not but most of my connections are successful and that I let them [referring to family members] know that I truly care about your child. So that's why I work hard outside of the classroom too to build those relationships. I don't know everything about my Black males but I do know some things. The parents let me know important stuff in their lives and I think that comes out of making those connections.

Further, during an examination of his classroom bulletin boards and Facebook account, I noticed the pictures Mr. Javien displays of him spending times in the communities of many of his Black male kindergarteners. They are often seen enjoying many of the cultural events held in their communities. For example, under the picture that was uploaded to Facebook the following caption was written, “After work hanging out with da lil ppl in Blackhills (pseudonym)” [the little people in Blackhills.

Mr. Javien perceives that as a result of developing strong relationships with parents, he is able to connect with Black male students beyond the classroom and in non-academic ways. Although he admits that he does not know everything about them outside of the schooling context, and that every attempt to build relationships with their parents is not successful, he still has successful interactions with them. That is, some parents alert him of personal happenings in their children’s lives. In one instance, he suggests that a mother of one of his Black male students informed him about the death of her husband who was active in her son’s life. Knowing that he could not ever replace the love and care of the Black boy’s biological father, he spends time mentoring him outside of the classroom setting. During a focus group discussion, Mrs. Cherise suggests that she enjoys attending parent-teacher conferences because of such strong relationship Mr. Javien has with his parents and the assistance she receives for her son.

While most Black male teachers are expected to meet both the academic and non-academic needs of Black male students in response to deficit thinking regarding Black males and fathers (Brown, 2012), Mr. Javien became active in the life of this Black male student beyond the classroom to continue to build on the active role the Black father already played in the life of his Black son. Drawing from Cook’s (2010) notion of fictive



kin, it is important to note that Black teachers who are fictive kin know how to support Black students in non-academic ways and beyond the classroom setting, which also contributes to their academic success in the classroom. Ladson-Billings (2009) suggests that culturally relevant teachers also know how to meet the needs of Black children “beyond the boundaries of the classroom” (p. 67). Therefore, my study addresses ways Black male teachers support Black male students in non-academic ways that is not in response to deficit thinking regarding Black males and their fathers. Such study could assist in shifting educators’ mindset about the role of the Black male teacher. In the next section, I discuss how Mr. Javien has high expectations for and build resilience among his Black male kindergarteners.

### **Having High Expectations and Building Resilience**

While supporting his Black male students in non-academic ways is one beneficial aspect of his kindergarten classroom, Mr. Javien also finds it important to have high expectations for them. During a conversation in his classroom, he speaks to how he has high expectations for his Black male students:

You [referring to his students] may not reach them the way I want you to reach them or at the time I want you to reach them (referring to expectations) but you’re going to reach them or you’re going to attempt to reach them. And when you’re attempting to reach them, I’ll meet you half way. If you can do your personal best, I’m fine with that per se.

In support of his conversation regarding high expectations, I noticed during several observations that Black male students who submitted incomplete assignments or assignments that did not represent their best work, were always provided opportunities to

try again. On one occasion, Mr. Javien assigned a written assignment where students were expected to practice writing their names. A Black male student, Breon, submitted his paper. Mr. Javien commented, “Breon, I have seen you write your name better than this. Go back and try again. There is no reason to rush this assignment. Take this sheet of paper and try again.” Breon took the sheet of paper from Mr. Javien, returned to his seat, and began to write his name again. When Mr. Javien collected the assignment, he looked at Breon and commented, “I knew you were able to do better than what you did the first time.” Later I asked Mr. Javien why he required Breon to re-submit his writing assignment. He commented, “Breon doesn’t like to write so every time he rushes [his writing assignment] I tell him to re-do [it] because when he does write he does it really well.” Mrs. Martha also speaks about the high expectations Mr. Javien has for her grandson. She suggests:

They use to let them in math count their fingers. He lets them do it but he also wants them to think. My baby sometimes tell me when I tell him to use his fingers to count or something else to count, he says, ‘Mr. Javien tell us to think.’

Based on our conversation and what he demonstrated in his instructional practices, Mr. Javien maintained high expectations for all of his Black male (and female) students collectively, but also had high expectations for individual students as he recognized each of their academic abilities as being great. Mr. Javien also felt it was his responsibility to provide his students flexibility as they attempt to meet his expectations and saw it as his responsibility “to meet them halfway.” Moreover, while maintaining high expectations for his Black male students including Breon, he was also building resilience in them. From the perspective of Afrocentric constructions of Black

masculinity, it is important to note that Black men are always seen as resilient (White & Cones, 1999). In most schools and classrooms, teachers typically have low expectations for Black male students because they already view them as lazy, unintelligent, and undisciplined before they enter classrooms (Dancy, 2014; Howard, 2014). Ladson-Billings (2002) note that most teachers grant Black male (and female) students permission to fail. Khalifa (2011) also suggests that White (and Black) teachers' negative views of Black boys impact the way they interact with them and further explain why they engage in deal-making with them. Khalifa describes deal-making as the act where White teachers agree to ignore and leave Black males to their own demise without much encouragement to engage academically, if Black males agree to allow them 'to do their job.' This type of negative interaction and bargaining in most classrooms serves to help us understand that most teachers do not understand their role in the collective achievement or ways they contribute to the academic success of Black males (Hucks, 2011).

In most cases, teachers have higher expectations for Black female students than for their male ones (Howard, 2014). This idea is not to minimize the complexities of being Black and female in K-12 schools. Clearly, research studies indicate that schools are also sites of Black suffering for Black girls (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Winn, 2010). Yet, most teachers fail to build resilience among Black boys and discourage instead of motivate them to do their best (Kunjufu, 2010). Cook (2010) indicates that Black teachers who are fictive kin teach Black students how to be resilient during challenging times inside and outside of the classrooms. Teaching Black male students to be resilient in the face of opposition is an important idea in kindergarten classrooms,

because schools and society are challenging spaces for Black males, which require resilience on their part to navigate and to be successful therein (Dancy, 2014; Coates, 2015; Howard, 2014). The recent murders of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, John Crawford and other Black men (since it is a national epidemic) remind us of the complexities of being both Black and male in schools and society (Dancy, 2014; Love, 2013). In the next section, I explore how Mr. Javien uplifts Black males through positive affirmation.

### **Uplifting Black Male Students Through Positive Affirmations**

In the same manner that having high expectations and building resilience within his Black male kindergarteners are essential components of his classroom, Mr. Javien also uplifts his Black male kindergarteners through positive affirmations. In one of the interviews, he explained why he uses positive affirmations to encourage his students. Mr. Javien finds that positively affirming Black male students is a way to keep them interested in education, encourage them, and build a sense of pride. On several occasions during classroom observations, he praises his Black male (and female) students by using terms such as, “Very good my brother” and nice job my sister,” which demonstrates his intimate, cultural connections with his students. Mr. Tal refers to students of other ethnicities by their first names. In the Afrocentric tradition, African-centered people often refer to other Black people as ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ (X & Haley, 1964). This is also consistent with the idea of fictive kinship networks (Cook, 2010; Fordham, 1996). Mr. Javien admits that school is a challenging space, because it was even challenging for him as he struggled as a student. However, he remarks that if he were able to overcome difficulties in the schooling process, he knows his Black male students are able to do

likewise. Most schools are not positively affirming spaces for Black boys as they are often dehumanized before they enter therein (Howard, 2014). While Black boys are in schools, more efforts are made to discourage instead of encourage them (Kujunfu, 2013). Nevertheless, there are some schools that positively affirm Black male students (Hopkins, 1997; Howard, 2014; King, 2011). That is, they provide them the necessary uplift and positive affirmation to continue the education process. For example, the Urban Prep Academy uplifts its Black male students in such a way that encourages most of its graduates to pursue post-secondary education (King, 2011).

What I thought was a truly powerful way to positively affirm his Black male students came through an example Mr. Javien shared during an informal conversation after he had attended a conference for Black male teachers relative to effective teaching strategies for Black children. He shared with me that one of his Black male students, Zachariah, constantly referred to himself as being “Brown” instead of “Black.” Mr. Javien contends that he positively affirmed Zachariah by helping him understand that he is Black and there is nothing wrong with being Black. Zechariah continued to insist that he was “Brown.” Mr. Javien told me that he gave Zechariah the book entitled *Shades of Black* to take home to read, which celebrates Black beauty and the diversity of Blackness. He relates that Zechariah still insisted that he was “Brown.” He then stated that he pulled up a job application to help Zechariah understand that “Brown” is not a racial category on job applications and that he was Black. He further added that he pulled up the school data management system, Power School, to show Zechariah that his racial category was marked “Black” and not “Brown.”

Mr. Javien may have misinterpreted Zechariah's actions, and may not be aware that young children often describe exact colors rather than racial categories when describing people (Boutte, LaPoint & Davis, 1993; Delpit, 2007). However, Mr. Javien's approach is still useful in his kindergarten classroom. Zechariah, like all Black boys, need to know that "there's nothing wrong with being Black." Black males are not only convicted in the womb (King, 2011; Upchurch, 1997), but they are, like Black people in general, also taught to hate themselves before they enter the world (Woodson, 1933). Such hate is reflected in school curriculum and other school-related resources including books (King, 2005, 2011). For this reason, during a conversation in his classroom, Mr. Javien spoke about being intentional about purchasing books that were representative of the experiences of Black children. In some cases, Black children are tired of reading about White boys and their dogs (Grinberg, 2016). In other words, Black children are taught to internalize White Supremacy in such a way that they come to hate Blackness (Asante, 1988; King, 2005). Even young children in early childhood education have come to understand the benefits of being White (Boutte et al., 2011). However, Mr. Javien attempts to assist Zechariah in developing his consciousness and to help him see and understand the beauty of Blackness by sharing a book he could read at home, which could help him develop an appreciation for Blackness (not that he did not have it). Culturally relevant pedagogues draw from the cultural wealth of Black people to help Black children come to value Blackness to work against internalized racist ideologies in K-12 classrooms. In the following section, I explore ways Mr. Javien involves his families inside and outside of the classroom.

### **Involving Black Families Inside and Outside of the Classroom Context**

Mr. Javien not only positively affirms his Black male kindergartners, but he also finds value in involving their family members inside and outside of the schooling context. During a conversation in his classroom, he related that he often has opportunities to ride the bus 2 or 3 times a year to learn about his children's communities. During these times, he walks around the community to introduce himself to relatives and community members. Milner (2015) notes that many school districts enable teachers to take bus excursions to view the communities in which students live. However, he argues that such excursions are often not effective, as they may reify stereotypes teachers have about Black students and those who live in poverty. Unlike the one-time bus excursions critiqued by Milner (2015), Mrs. Martha notices that Mr. Javien takes time to get to know children and families as he attends the local community events where he interacts with them. She thinks highly of him because he spends time in the community even though he does not live in the community. Mrs. Martha further proposes that most teachers do not even take the time to familiarize themselves with the community in which they work. Many scholars concur (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009). Ladson-Billings (1994/2009) acknowledges that culturally irresponsible teachers devalue Black communities. However, culturally relevant pedagogues are familiar with Black communities and draw from the cultural wealth of them to support Black students. They see teaching as "giving something back to these community and [encourage] students to do the same" (p. 38).

During a classroom observation, I noticed that Mr. Javien, instead of sending Black males students who were interrupting the instructional process to the principal's office, he often calls family members with whom he collaborated to develop strategies to

assist those Black male students who were interrupting the classroom environment. In one particular situation, Mr. Javien called Keith's mother because he was interrupting a lesson Mr. Javien was teaching. Mr. Javien secretly warned Keith that he would call his mother. However, Keith continued to not participate in class and continued to interrupt the learning environment. A few minutes later, Mr. Javien decided to call Keith's mother. During the conversation, I overheard Mr. Javien ask his mother, "What do you suggest I do?" Later I asked Mr. Javien about what the mother suggested. He relayed, "She told me to tell him that if he continued misbehaving she would come sit in class with him." A few hours later she came to sit with him for part of the class session.

Mr. Javien sees making family connections as an important component of his kindergarten classroom. Not only does he invite family members to be a vital part of what goes on inside of the classroom, but he also invites them to events outside of school. That is, he often invites them to engage in bowling, and football nights. These events were indicated on several class calendars he shared with family members and me. During a focus group discussion, Mrs. Cherise spoke about these events. She said she never knew kindergartner teachers organized such outings. She stated that she never had the opportunity until Mr. Javien invited her to participate in those outings. While having these events, Mr. Javien feels that his Black male students will see him as more than just their teacher, but also someone who is investing in their wellbeing. Due to limited bi-directional attempts to engage families (Boutte & Johnson, 2014; Johnson, 2015), most Black family members feel unwelcomed or uninvited to public schools. Most of the family involvement efforts for Black and other families of color in urban and suburban schools flow in one direction—from the school to the families (and not vice-versa)



(Boutte & Johnson, 2014; Johnson, 2015). However, Mr. Javien demonstrates the ability to counter such experiences for Black families and engage them in family-centered approaches that involve Black family members in the educational process of their children.

Historically, social gatherings including those activities in which Mr. Javien engages his families were used to involve Black family members during segregated Black schooling in the South (Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1996). Foster (1997) documents Black family members who attended school plays and other student-centered social gathering were able to meet with Black teachers to inquire about the academic performance of their children. It is rare that teachers, across all races, engage family members outside of the schooling context beyond the few Parent-Teacher Association meetings, conferences, and open houses (Boutte & Johnson, 2013). Most teachers maintain the status quo relative to family involvement by upholding one-dimensional family strategies that often marginalize Black and other families of color, while privileging White families (Boutte & Johnson, 2013). Black family members are often stereotypically portrayed as being uninvolved in the educational experiences (Boutte & Johnson, 2013). However, scholars often do not critique institutional and structural barriers that influence Black family's decisions to be "involved" in schools (Boutte & Johnson, 2013; Johnson, 2014). Considering that parental involvement is narrowly defined (Johnson, 2014), Black family members are involved in ways schools do not often value (Boutte & Johnson, 2013). My study demonstrates ways Black family members are actively involved in the educational processes of their children and the role Black male teachers play in encouraging bi-directional family involvement, particularly

in early childhood spaces. Thus, similar to ways most Black teachers have engaged in pedagogical practices to counter culturally irresponsible practices in K-12 classrooms (Foster, 1997; Gay, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009), Black teachers have the potential to engage in culturally responsive family involvement practices as a way to counter culturally irresponsible family practices in K-12 schools (Siddle-Walker, 1996).

Similarly, Mr. Javien values the voices of his Black family members when he has to discipline a child, which is a different kind of disciplinary approach that counters the approaches of many K-12 classrooms. In most schools, Black children are suspended and expelled from them for minor behavioral infractions (Losen, 2013; Schott Foundation, 2010). Mrs. Martha and Mrs. Cherise also noticed how different Mr. Javien's disciplinary practices are in his classroom.

**Martha:** I can see with his [referring to her grandson] condition... the condition he was when he first came in there, he is totally different. Sometimes, I think Mr. Javien did too good of a job with mine.

**Bryan:** That's wonderful!

**Martha:** He (*referring to her grandson*) won't shut up! (*laughs*)

(*Bryan and Cherise laugh.*)

**Cherise:** Mine too...mine would not (*emphasis added*) be quiet!

**Martha:** Mr. Javien encourage the students to talk to him. He tells them you are not going to bow your head and cover your mouth...talk to me.... That's what I like about him.

**Cherise:** Right! He is not going to play around with them. He is going to tell them what it is and how it is.

**Martha:** And the children takes it in. They takes it in. One day my grandson was acting out in class, he got very scared when Mr. Javien said I am going to call your grandmomma. Mr. Javien had just called the teacher next door but my grandson thought he had call me. So when he got home he was scared thinking that Mr. Javien had call me.

**Cherise:** That goes to show how he is about discipline in a different way.

**Martha:** Right! He gives it to them but he does not raise his voice. He doesn't really punish them. He gives them many chances. He just have them keep doing it until they get it right.

Whereas most teachers in K-12 schools dismiss Black male students from classrooms for subjective school infractions (Bryan & Ford, 2014; Dancy, 2014; Losen, 2013; Schott Foundations, 2012), Mr. Javien takes advice from Black family members to avoid sending Black male kindergartners to the principal's office. Bryan et al. (2016) and Milner and Tenore (2010) note that in most early childhood program, like most schools in general, Black family members are rarely involved in and/or consulted for their wisdom as a disciplinary practices. These authors note that when Black family members are involved in such processes, it could reduce the number of Black children, particularly Black males who are suspended and expelled from schools. Milner and Tenore (2010) suggest that culturally relevant teachers are intentional about finding ways to involve Black and other family members of color in classroom discipline.

While it is important to note that Mr. Javien engages in culturally relevant disciplinary practices in his classroom, it is also essential to acknowledge the element of play, which is embedded in the example Mrs. Martha provided. She suggested that Mr.

Javien pretended to call her, but instead called the neighboring teacher to discipline Ameer. Brown (2009) proposes that one of the pedagogical performance styles of Black male teachers is that they are playful or they use a carefree style of teaching. However, in this case, Mr. Javien uses a ‘carefree style of disciplining.’ In the next section, I explore how Mr. Javien introduces and infuses Black music in his kindergarten classroom.

### **Introducing and Infusing Black Music Into His Kindergarten Classroom**

There is a growing body of research that connects Black music to teaching and learning in classrooms (Alim, 2006; Hill, 2009; Love, 2013) . However, there is limited research regarding way Black male teachers, particularly Black male kindergarten teachers infuse Black music into the curriculum. Despite the understudy of Black music in educational research among Black male teachers, Mr. Javien finds ways to integrate Black music into his curriculum to support the learning of his Black male kindergarten students. Drawing from his personal admiration for Black culture and music, Mr. Javien understand the importance of using said music to inform lessons in his kindergarten classroom. He sees integrating music into his lesson as not only integrating music, but also helping his student to make cultural connections. Further, Mr. Javien demonstrates specific ways he integrates Black music into his kindergarten classroom. During two of the classroom observations, I witnessed lessons in which he integrated said music.

**Mr. Javien:** I taught a lesson using Bruno Mars and music from Funk Town. I took the songs and change the words per se to use the sight words they have to learn so they can remember them. So they basically write their own song to help them learn. For me, music does a lot. For children, they need that and they need

the movement to help make their learning experience a little more connected to them.

Drawing from critical race theory, the use of African-American music in early childhood classrooms serves as counter-narratives to dominant narratives and ideologies in early childhood education that support and value the use and application of White-centered nursery rhymes and other musical forms. From a culturally relevant perspective, Black music demonstrates the cultural wealth within Black community that is often on the periphery of K-12 schools (Ladson-Billings, 2009). For Black people, music has historically been used as counter-narratives to resist White dominance and racism in societal spaces (West & Buschendorf, 2014). When Black male kindergarteners are able to experience music they are accustomed to hearing in their homes and communities in early childhood education, it builds their pride and helps them acknowledge the wealth and wisdom inherent in Black communities. Most importantly, it becomes an act of social justice that suggests that Black lives and music do matter in early childhood classrooms, when dominant narratives and stories suggest otherwise. An important component of this study is to elicit the voices of Black male kindergarteners regarding the identities and pedagogical styles of Black males teachers. Thus, in the next section, Black male kindergarteners share their perceptions regarding Mr. Javien's identities and pedagogical styles.

### **Black Male Kindergartners on Mr. Javien**

On one hand, Demarcus, a Black male kindergartener contends, "He likes to give us work." On the other, Marquavious suggests, "He let us do fun stuff." They were describing their teacher Mr. Javien. I invoke the words of E. L. Blackshear (1902, 1969)

who suggested that “ [The Black teacher’s] superior culture and character has acted as a powerful stimulus to the easily roused imagination of the colored youth, and the Black boy feels, in the presence of the Black ‘professah’ to him the embodiment of learning, that he too can become ‘something’ (p. 337).” Black male kindergarteners in Mr. Javien’s class had very unique ways of describing his identities and pedagogical styles that suggest they “easily roused their imagination.” An important component of this research study was to determine how Black male kindergartners construct the identities and pedagogical styles of their Black male kindergarten teachers. Therefore, Black male students in Mr. Javien’s kindergarten classroom were presented opportunities to speak about their teacher. In their own way, they suggested that Mr. Javien utilizes culturally relevant and/or Black masculine literacies to support them in kindergarten classrooms. Moreover, they perceived that Mr. Javien plays with and relates to them inside and outside of the classroom.

### **Utilizing Culturally Relevant and/or Black Masculine Literacy Practices**

During the focus group, Demarcus suggests that Mr. Javien integrates his family into the curriculum. Consider our conversation,

**Bryan:** Do you know what else Mr. Javien helps you learn?

**Marquavious:** Yes, we be doing math too.

**Demarcus** (*interrupting*): And one time I draw a book about my family.

**Bryan:** Hold on Demarcus. Let Marquavious finish. Did you have anymore to say Marquavious?

**Marquavious:** No.

**Bryan:** Ok Demarcus. What did you draw?

**Demarcus:** One time I draw my family book. My family really really ain't that big. So I had draw a picture of my momma, my auntie, my brutha, my daddy and that's it. He be knowing all my family but not my cousin.

**Bryan:** Who knows all of your family?

**Demarcus:** Mr. Javien.

Demarcus suggested that Mr. Javien integrates his family into the curriculum as he is afforded the opportunity to create a book that highlights his family, most of whom Mr. Javien knows. Scholars acknowledge that integrating Black and other families into school literacy practices is a culturally relevant approach to teaching literacy (Boutte, Hopkins & Wataskli, 2008). It is culturally relevant because it is oppositional to the traditional school practices that marginalizes and/or vilifies Black and other families of color in schoolbooks. Often, early childhood spaces are full of images of White-middle class families in books and other resources (Souto-Manning, 2013). Thus, to have an opportunity to see his family positively represented in the curriculum helps Demarcus shift the narratives that often depict Black families in negative ways (Boutte, 2015; Boutte et al., 2008).

Ameer also contends that Mr. Javien uses a culturally relevant approach to teaching literacy as he integrates “rap music” into the literacy curriculum. Ameer discusses this phenomenon:

**Bryan:** Ok, thank you Demarcus. Can anyone else tell me what Mr. Javien is really good at doing inside of the classroom? How about you Ameer?

**Ameer:** I think he really good at... (*pauses for a long time*).

**Bryan:** What is one thing he teaches you that you really think he is good at?

**Ameer:** I think he good at reading the books.

**Bryan:** Why do you think he is good at reading books?

**Ameer:** 'Cause he always read the good book.

**Bryan:** What are the good books?

**Ameer:** I can show you. They over there.

*(Ameer points to the book on the shelves)*

**Bryan:** So what makes the books good?

**Ameer:** They be fun.

**Bryan:** What makes the books fun?

**Ameer:** You can listen to kinda like a rap.

**Bryan:** What do you mean?

**Ameer:** You can sing a song in the book.

**Bryan:** Oh, so you are talking about rap songs?

**Ameer:** Yea.

Further, during one of our interviews, Mr. Javien told me that he had to purchase some books that represented the experiences of Black children, because most of the required books in kindergarten classrooms are not representative of their experiences. I noticed that Mr. Javien had a bookshelf full of books that represented Black children including *Nappy Hair*, *'Shades of Black, I love my hair*, and *The Two Tyrones*, to list a few. Mr. Javien mentioned that his principal was in the process of ordering more Black-centered books.

While acknowledging Mr. Javien's culturally relevant literacy practices in the classroom, Ameer is also challenging the use of conventional literacy practices in early



childhood classroom. In other words, he described books that were “good” and “fun” as those which enabled him to connect reading to a cultural mode familiar to him (hip-hop). Based on Ameer’s response, he finds literacies that do not embrace rap as un-engaging or not fun. Moreover, many scholars argue that literacy is a cultural and social practice (Kirkland, 2011; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009; Morrell, 2004). That is, it can be represented in diverse ways (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009). However, such unconventional way of approaching literacy is often missing from most classrooms, particularly early childhood classrooms, where literacy may simply be defined as just readings words from texts and not an embodied cultural and social practice (Kirkland, 2011). Thus, these ideas could possibly explain why most Black boys do not ‘perform’ well in reading and national reading assessments as indicted via national assessment data (Howard, 2014; Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2015; Tatum, 2005).

Moreover, considering that hip-hop music is stereotypically portrayed as having a negative influence on Black children, particularly Black males (Bridges, 2011; Hill, 2009; Love, 2013), Ameer perceived hip-hop music to be an essential component to engage him in the literacy process. However, because of the negative perception of hip-hop music, it is often on the periphery of K-12 teachings, as are most Black cultural modes including African American Language (Hill, 2009; Smitherman, 1999). Although few scholars have explored its influence in early childhood classrooms, other scholars (Emdin, 2010; Hill, Perez, & Irby, 2008; Love, 2013) have found it useful in secondary schools, particularly in content areas including science and literacy. My study explores the usefulness of hip-hop music in teaching literacy in early childhood classrooms, and ways Black male teachers, particularly in early childhood education, utilize hip-hop

music to facilitate the teaching of literacy and other content areas in early childhood classrooms. Considering that culturally relevant pedagogy embraces the global identities of Black and other children (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Paris, 2012), this idea is important as hip-hop music represents global identities of most Black, Brown (and White) children nationally.

In the present study, hip-hop music that was integrated into literacy practices was also gender-relevant for Black boys (and girls). That is, it not only embraces cultural referents familiar to many Black children, but it also embraces gender identity referents familiar to both boys and girls. While scholars have explored the importance of making teaching and learning relevant for Black boys (Bristol, 2015), few scholars (Haddix, 2009; Kirkland, 2011; Tatum, 2005) have explored ways literacy practices are gender-relevant for Black male students. This is particularly true at the early childhood levels. Kirkland and Jackson (2009) posit that Black masculine literacies or literacies that are influenced by black masculine identity and pop cultural models are also essential tools to engage Black male students in literacy practices in K-12 classrooms. Therefore, drawing from hip-hop to support literacy practices is also an engagement with Black masculine literacies, although not a panacea. In other words, similar to Howard (2014), it is not my goal to essentialize the experiences of Black boys. In the same manner in which it is clear that all Black boys do not like sports (Howard, 2014), they all do not like hip-hop.

To further this idea regarding the use of hip-hop and literacy, during a classroom observation, Mr. Javien uses the term “headliner” to build on the idea of a community-centered classroom and to help the students understand that there was no single individual in charge of the classroom. Immediately one of his Black male students, Keith,

who was sitting at the front of the class asked, “What is that?” Mr. Javien then explained to his students:

Let me help you understand what a headliner is. You know when you go to Jay-Z or Beyonce concert, they are the headliners because they are in-charge on the stage. There ain’t no headliners in this class. You understand that Keith?

The integration of sight words and other vocabulary terminology seems to be an essential component of Mr. Javien’s kindergarten classroom, which many of his Black (and females) take advantage of to build their own vocabulary. Mr. Javien draws from hip-hop artists to make those connections to help his students better understand vocabulary words. While many scholars have utilized hip-hop to inform literacy practices in the K-12 classroom (Hill, 2009; Love, 2013), my study intentionally focuses on ways hip-hop referents can be used to increase vocabulary in early childhood classrooms. Hip-hop artist are known to have the highest average vocabulary across all music genres (Musixmatch, 2015). Therefore, hip-hop could have potential to build vocabulary among Black males (and females) in kindergarten classrooms. Moreover, Mr. Javien is also modeling how he values African-American Language (AAL) in the kindergarten classroom as he uses it to help students understand concepts. Most teachers view AAL from a deficit perspective; thus, even teachers who are speakers of AAL avoid using it in classrooms (Alim & Smitherman, 2012; Boutte & Johnson, 2013; Smitherman, 1999). Culturally relevant teachers value the linguistic capital Black and other children of color bring to classrooms (Boutte & Johnson, 2012; Delpit, 2006; Volk & Long, 2005). I now explore the perceptions of Mr. Javien’s male students who suggest he plays and relates to them inside and outside of the classroom.

## **Playing With and Relating to Black Male Kindergarteners Inside and Outside of the Classroom**

Although the culturally relevant and Black masculine literacy practices (e.g., hip hop, relevant books) that Mr. Javien used were important to Black male students, they also perceived the importance of being able to play with and relate to Mr. Javien both inside and outside of the classroom. Below, Ameer speaks to how Mr. Javien plays with his classmates and him.

**Bryan:** Ok, I'll let you think about that. So Ameer, what do you think about Mr. Javien?

**Ameer:** He nice.

**Bryan:** How is he nice?

**Ameer:** He let us go outside...and we...and we play games outside.

**Bryan:** What kind of games do you play outside?

**Ameer:** He be runnin wit us.

**Bryan:** Who be runnin with you?

**Ameer:** Mr. Javien.

**Bryan:** Ok, Ameer. Could you tell me more about Mr. Javien? What do you think about Mr. Javien?

**Ameer:** He tell us to be good.

**Bryan:** Can you think of anything else?

**Ameer:** He say tie your shoes for [before] you fall.

Ameer implies that Mr. Javien is a ‘nice’ individual because he runs with he and his classmates outside. Embedded in this statement is the idea that teachers who may not know how to play with Black boys in such a way may not be ‘nice’.

**Bryan:** Ok, Demarcus, what is Mr. Javien really good at?

**Demarcus:** Running...

**Bryan:** How do you know he is good at running?

**Demarcus:** Cause we always run in the gym...and then when we go home on the bus.

**Bryan:** Ok!

**Demarcus:** We go outside and he be racing us and he win. He always win but sometimes somebody wins. And sometime he ...When we be at P.E. I know how to beat Mr. Javien all the time when we play basketball. He ain’t really that good cause he say he don’t be playing all the time like when he was a little boy but sometime he do beat Cameroun cause he ain’t that good at basketball.

Although Demarcus confirms that Mr. Javien plays with students in the same manner in which Ameer does, he also felt more comfortable criticizing Mr. Javien and did not expect any repercussions. This idea speaks volumes about the nature of their relationship both inside and outside of the classroom.

While research studies have explored the importance of play in the lives of children (Singer, 2013), few studies have focused specifically on play in the lives of Black male students in early childhood education. Moreover, at the time of this study, what is limited in the literature on play in early childhood education is the importance of play to Black boys in schools and the role Black male teachers play in facilitating play in

kindergarten classrooms. Research on such explorations is scant because Black male kindergarteners are not given the same attention in the academic literature as their White counterparts in early childhood education (Rashid, 2009). If Black male kindergarteners see play as an important part of their educational process and see Black male teachers as effective at facilitating play through sports, research studies could help broaden our understanding about Black male teachers, play, and their influence on Black male students. Because Black male kindergarteners perceive Black male teachers to use culturally relevant and Black masculine literacy practices and engage them in play, it is also important to understand their family members' perceptions of Mr. Javien.

### **Black Family Members on Mr. Javien**

I knew before he [referring to her grandson] got to kindergarten that he was the teacher there and that is where I wanted mine to be... He kinda teach them the way they learn. That is what I liked about him. (Mrs. Martha)

I worked with him once because I substitute sometimes... So I have seen him in action... It is amazing how he can grasp their attention. (Mrs. Cherise)

These quotes came from two Black mothers who had sons in Mr. Javien's kindergarten classroom. They understood the importance of Mr. Javien's Afro-centric and male identities and pedagogical styles in the kindergarten classroom. On one hand, Mrs. Martha suggests that she knew Mr. Javien was the kindergarten teacher before she enrolled her grandson in kindergarten and wanted him to be in his classroom because "he kinda teach them the way they learn." On the other hand, Mrs. Cherise understood, from a pedagogical perspective, that Mr. Javien was effective at "[grasping their attention]." Acknowledging such understandings regarding Mr. Javien, they perceived him to be a

teacher who knew how to teach Black male kindergartners in a way that meets their individual needs. Finally, they saw Mr. Javien as a teacher who minimized their distrust for White female teachers. Below I further explore each of these themes.

### **Addressing the Individual Needs of Black Male Kindergartners**

What was overwhelmingly respected about Mr. Javien were ways he was able to meet not only to meet the collective needs of his Black male kindergartners, but also their individual needs. Consider the following dialogic exchange in references to this idea,

**Bryan:** Thinking about Mr. Javien's teaching style, if anything, what do you like about it?

**Cherise:** It's fun.

**Martha** (*interrupts Cherise*): To me, he teaches like the child learns. I know there are certain things that the district say that he got to teach 'em [them] at such and such a time but I think he told me that all children can't learn the same way at the same time and if they would let him and stop putting so much responsibility on him... I think he can do an even better job because he teaches a child the way the child learn. Instead of making a child learn the way you want him to, you gotta find other ways to do it.

**Cherise** (*concurring*): Yes, because some children learn one way...He will work with 'em and put the others in another group so that Mrs. P could work with them. So she can teach it the other way.

**Martha:** Yes, I like the way he teaches the way they learn instead of making them learn the way they want him to teach. If they would give him a little more

latitude, I think he can do a little bit better with them. The district...the administrator say you gotta teach this, this at that time.

Mrs. Martha and Mrs. Cherise value Mr. Javien's pedagogical work because they perceive it as meeting the individual academic needs of their Black male kindergartners. Many scholars consider such an idea as differentiation of instruction (Tomlinson, 2014; Tomlinson & Moon, 2014; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). That is, scholars have come to understand that not all children learn in the same ways and have provided pedagogical strategies to support the individual academic needs of students (Tomlinson, 2014). However, differentiation of instruction neither considers sociocultural nor sociopolitical issues. However, while there is a growing body of research on differentiation of instruction (Tomlinson, 2014; Tomlinson & Moon, 2014; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010), my study explores ways to ensure the sociocultural and sociopolitical nature of differentiation of instruction and how Black male teachers engage in it to support the academic needs of Black male students. Moreover, drawing from culturally relevant pedagogy and fictive kinship networks, Ladson-Billings (2009) and Cook (2010) assert that culturally relevant teachers and fictive kin know how to meet the individual academic (and social) needs of Black students. In term of culturally relevant teachers and fictive kin, they know how to use both human and material resources to support students individually (Cook, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2010). In the next section, I explore how Black parents perceive Mr. Javien to be a teacher who minimizes their distrust for White teachers and other educational professionals.



## **Perceptions of Mr. Javien as a Teacher Who Minimizes Their Distrust for White Female Teachers and Other Educational Professionals**

Mrs. Martha and Mrs. Cherise specifically expressed their distrust for White teachers based on situations they had witnessed and/or experienced in schools in their capacities as teacher assistant and substitute teacher. Note the following dialogic exchange as they were asked to define role models but began to discuss their distrust for White teachers:

**Mrs. Cherise:** Yes, but some of them can't relate to... White teachers can't relate to Black males.

**Bryan:** What do you mean?

**Cherise:** I mean I don't want to say struggle but their lifestyle is totally different and I don't think they can relate to what they have to deal with.

**Martha:** And my experience with these Black and White couples... the experience I have had with them personally... it shouldn't have been...

**Bryan:** Ok...

**Martha:** It shouldn't have been.

**Cherise :** Martha!

**Martha:** I am old fashion... I have two nephews that married a white woman.

**Cherise:** I know one of them.

**Martha:** They should have been shot when they went to the altar. I'm sorry.

**Cherise:** Yes, the one I know his wife... just do anything.

**Bryan:** (*trying to shift conversation*): Cherise, you made a good point about white teachers. I wonder how we can further explore that idea.

**Martha:** Baby, I'm getting to my point... I'm going back to white teachers...but hold on... Yes, I know...should have shot both of 'em at the altar. I got a brother... I love my brother to death... I told 'em don't bring them girls to my house. I'm sorry... She did not want him until he got his little position. Any other time she didn't want him. So I don't really care for my son having a white teacher.

**Cherise:** Joshua, my middle son, I can say his teacher is a White female. He has excelled this year. Now he has done magnificent. But some of 'em [them]...

**Bryan:** What other experience you have with White teachers?

**Martha:** I'm sorry to say I did everything in my power to break my grandson out of a habit I did not like. My baby from the age of 2 until the age of five. He couldn't stand white people. And we never understood why. When they had his speech checked, this white woman checked his speech, she said he can't hear. This Black woman came and checked him. She said his hearing is perfect. Another white woman tested him for speech... he can't talk...he might have to have his tongue clip...this Black woman came...said the total opposite.

**Cherise:** See that is the thing...there is not enough interactions with our kids...and then when they do interact with them, they treat your child differently.

**Martha:** I have a strong dislike for them. My momma was killed by a White man...the judge told 'em... you know what the judge told 'em... 'One less nigger you got to worry about.... This White man killed my mother.

**Cherise:** That was in South Carolina?

**Martha:** In South Carolina... I know that was in '62 but as a 13 year child and you hear a White man say that's just one less nigger you got to worry about.... And told the man go on your way... I have to learn to get the hatred out of my heart but I just can't... I'm sorry... They say learn how to forgive... I'm trying to forgive but I can't forget.

**Bryan:** Do you feel the same way about them as teachers too?

**Martha:** (pause) Not... Oh yes! It's hard for me to get pass that point in my head. I'm going to tell you I lost five years of my life...I can't get it back...

**Cherise:** What do you do when you have white teachers who don't like black, I mean Black children?

**Bryan:** That's a great and powerful question.

**Martha:** They buried my mother on my 13<sup>th</sup> birthday. Between 13 and 18, I can't remember those years. I have tried to get help for that... that is why I try to protect my grandbaby from things he may hear and see on TV.

**Bryan:** Have you heard White teachers say negative things to Black children?

**Cherise:** I'm not going to really say...

**Martha:** (*interrupting*)...say anything negative

**Cherise:** But the way their tone and attitude towards them happen

**Bryan:** Could you provide an example?

**Martha:** A little black boy got out of the line and a little white boy did the same...white teacher yelled at the Black boy..."Get yoself back in line....she told the White boy, baby, get back in line please." Our children can sense feelings we cannot sense...that's the scary part...

During the dialogic exchange between Mrs. Martha and Mrs. Cherise, Mrs. Cherise was the first to address the issues regarding her distrust and/or concern for White teachers not being able to relate to Black children, particularly Black boys. Mrs. Cherise was hesitant to provide specific examples at first regarding her reason for distrusting White teachers. Mrs. Cherise finally began to name specific examples that heighten her concern for them working with Black children. She spoke to the negative “attitude” and “tone” White teachers used with Black children, which led to a powerful question regarding solutions to resolve White teachers’ anti-Black hate towards Black children. Mrs. Martha further suggested that White teachers’ tone and attitudes were not the only concern, but also their expression of differential treatment between Black and White children.

Mrs. Cherise’s and Mrs. Martha’s accounts provide a counternarrative to the scholarship of Jean Anyon (1997) that suggests that Black teachers’ interactional styles with Black children in urban schools were demeaning and less than professional. Anyon did not consider the interactional styles of White teachers with Black children, which is often grounded in race and racism (Lynn, 2002). While Martha expressed concern and distrust for White teachers, they were connected to larger issues of distrust for White people in general. She connected her grandson’s speech and hearing misdiagnosis conducted by a White speech pathologist to her mother’s murder committed by the hands of a White man. Historically and currently, White people have been responsible for the individual and collective suffering of Black people in a way that has produced Black people’s collective distrust for White people in general (Coates, 2015; DuBois, 1933; Wilson, 1998; X & Haley, 1964). Drawing from critical race theory, these incidents

represent racial microaggressions, which lead to the idea that Black boys' lives do not matter in schools. While much scrutiny surrounds police brutality in society writ large, there is a growing need to continue to explore White teacher brutality against Black children, especially boys in K-12 schools. In light of the affliction Black children experience in schools, culturally relevant pedagogy offers healing to Black children's wounded spirits (Boutte, 2015; Dillard, 2012). In other words, it is the metaphorical sab that heal the deeply rooted pain face by both Black children and families. And, Black male (and female) Role Models are responsible for applying said sab to both children and families as a temporary reprise, unless the family members are assimilationists<sup>12</sup>.

It is important to note that while the Black family members in this study are positioned to bear the burden of distrusting White teachers, the same is not true for White family members. Because schools and society reinforce the cultural norms of White middle-class children, they are safe spaces for most White children (Souto-Manning, 2013; Long et al., 2016). Similarly, because the majority of teachers are White and middle-class, White family members view them as the norm of what a teacher should be in most cases. Hence, they may distrust teachers of color (Matias, 2013).

Black male (and female) students not only face acts of White racial violence towards them in K-12 schools (Anderson, 1988; Butchart, 2010; Coates, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2011), but Black male teachers also face it likewise. Mr. Javien shared personal stories regarding how a White male colleague and White family members inflicted racial violence towards him. During an interview with Mr. Javien at his home, he described that

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<sup>12</sup>Assimilationists are individuals who uphold the status quo in efforts to maintain White Supremacy. Assimilisionists are also known as 'coons' and 'Uncle Toms (DuBois, 1906; Woodson, 1933).

during a professional development session, he and his colleagues were asked to talk about the community in which they live. Mr. Javien shared where he lives, which is located in a predominately White community in the northern side of the city. When Mr. Javien told his colleagues where he lived, he stated that his White male colleague, who is in his mid-50's, asked in a surprising manner whether he actually lived in that community. Mr. Javien relays that based on the colleagues' facial expression, he knew his colleague was surprised he lived there. Moreover, Mr. Javien spoke about his interactions (or lack thereof) with White family members whose sons were in his kindergarten classroom. He mentions that during monitoring duty, he was charged with the responsibility of being in the carpool and opening car doors for the children. He conveyed that every time he opened the White family's car, he said "Good morning!" He noted that the White parents ignored his greeting. In most cases, the White family members did not acknowledge his presence. However, after he closed the door, he noticed the White family members were always amicable with the White female teachers who were also on duty. They honk their horns and waved. Thus, while Black males are shot in the streets by the hands of White policemen (Coates, 2015), they are metaphorically shot in professional spaces including schools. In other words, there is nowhere in American society where the Black male body is safe (Coates, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2011). Considering that few Black males are teachers and even fewer are becoming teachers (Lewis & Toldson, 2013; Sealey-Ruiz, Lewis, & Toldson, 2014), my study contributes to the educational literature which explores ways White racial violence in the form of racial microaggressions influence the lived experiences of Black boys and Black men teachers in schools. This is an important exploration, particularly for Black

men kindergarten teachers who are already on the periphery of early childhood education (Bryan & Browder, 2013). Sue and Constantine (2007) contend that racial microaggressions negatively influence the lived experiences of people of color that could possibly lead to racial battle fatigue. Racial battle fatigue consists of the weariness of the physical and mental state of Black and Brown people as a result of working against White racial violence (Fasching-Varner, Albert, Mitchell, & Allen, 2014; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Scholars theorize racial battle fatigue in their scholarly work (Fasching-Varner et al., 2014; Martin, 2015; Smith, Allen, Danley, 2007); however, I argue that scholars should move beyond racial battle fatigue to other racial battle conditions including what I refer to as ‘racial battle depression’ and ‘racial battle suicide’. Many people of color have become depressed as a result of working against White racial violence; whereas, others have even committed suicide (Bowerman, 2016; Jay, Packer, & Jackson, 2010).

### **Chapter Summary**

In summary, Mr. Javien perceives himself to be a fictive kin who draws from the wealth of the Black community to support his Black male kindergartens. That is, he fosters collaboration and build solidarity with his biological parents, former Black teachers and professors to support Black male kindergarteners in early childhood classroom. Drawing from such collaborations, he further self-identifies as a teacher who support Black male kindergartners in non-academic ways, while having high expectations and building resilience among them. He also uplifts his Black male kindergarteners through positive affirmation, involves Black family members inside and outside of the classroom, and integrates Black music into the classroom. Mr. Javien’s perception is

reality. Therefore, it became important to seek out the perceptions of Black male kindergarteners and their family members. According to Black male kindergartners, Mr. Javien uses culturally relevant and Black masculine literacy strategies in the kindergarten classroom and finds time to play and relates to them. Black family members also perceive Mr. Javien as a teacher who knows how to meet the individual needs of his Black male students. Finally, he minimizes their distrust for White teachers and other educational professionals. I now turn to Chapter 7 to explore the identities and pedagogical styles of Mr. Henry.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### COUNTER-STORYTELLING WITH AND ABOUT MR. HENRY

After using the term “role model” several times throughout our dialogic exchange, I asked Mrs. Boin to define what she meant by it. Mrs. Boin, Roland’s mother, is a local attorney and serves as the school’s PTA president. She describes what a Role Model means to her as we sat, along with Mrs. Felice, Joshua’s mother, who works in the professional capacity of a teacher at Ponce De Leon Elementary (Lower campus) where she and Mr. Henry works. Mrs. Boin relates:

Someone who does things or just live their lives and who live their lives in a respectful way. Someone people can look up to. They teach you how to not only be yourself but a different kind of way to be. It’s ok to be different. They teach you how to emulate. Especially for boys, like they’re well dressed, well spoken, and just someone who inspires you. They carry themselves in a way that you say, ... I admire that person and I can emulate that person because they are doing positive things. Someone you can emulate not imitate. That’s how I see. You can pick up good traits.

I agree with Mrs. Boin. Her definition of Role Model accurately describes Mr. Henry because he is someone his Black male students “can look up to” and who “inspires” them. However, there are several other identities that define Mr. Henry. Five themes were found regarding how Mr. Henry perceives his self-identity and pedagogical styles; two

regarding how his Black male kindergarteners perceived him; and three regarding how Black family members perceived him.

### **Five Major Themes Regarding Mr. Henry's Identities and Pedagogical Styles**

1. Mr. Henry self-identifies as a fictive father/daddy in the lives of his Black male students.
2. Mr. Henry also self-identifies as a fictive father/daddy who draws from the wisdom of his biological parents to support his Black male students in the kindergarten classroom.
3. Mr. Henry identifies as a fictive father who engages in extended academic and social conversation with his Black male kindergarteners.
4. Mr. Henry identifies as a fictive father who understands how his life and the lives of his Black male kindergarteners are critically raced and uses such understanding to influence experiences in the kindergarten classrooms.
5. Mr. Henry is a fictive father who uses Black music to make learning meaningful to Black male kindergartners.

### **Two Major Themes Regarding Mr. Henry's Identities and Pedagogical Styles as Perceived By Black Male Kindergarteners**

6. Black male kindergartners perceive Mr. Henry as a pedagogue who facilitates culturally relevant and Black masculine literacy practices.
7. Black male kindergarteners perceive Mr. Henry as a pedagogue who plays and relates to them inside and outside of the kindergarten classroom.

### **Three Major Themes Regarding Mr. Henry's Identities and Pedagogical Styles as Perceived By Black Family Members**

8. According to Black family members, Mr. Henry represents positive images of Black manhood as assets for Black male kindergartners.
9. Black family members perceive Mr. Henry to demonstrate intentional care and concern for the academic and social wellbeing of his Black male students.
10. Black family members perceive that Mr. Henry minimizes fear and distrust Black family members have for White teachers.

I start by discussing the most dominant of each of these themes relative to Mr. Henry's identities and pedagogical styles in his kindergarten classroom at Ponce De Leon Elementary School. However, before I discuss the themes, I introduce Table 7.1, which provides an excerpt of profiles regarding Black students and family member in this chapter.

Table 7.1

#### *Profiles of Black Male Kindergartners and Family Members*

<b>Name of Family Member</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Familial Role</b>	<b>Kindergartner</b>
<b>Mrs. Boin</b>	Black	Mother	Roland
<b>Mrs. Cherise</b>	Black	Mother	Joshua Dillon Mario

### **Counter-Storytelling With Mr. Henry**

#### **Serving as Fictive Father/Daddy in the Lives of Black Male Kindergartners**

When asked about his perceptions of Black male teachers, Mr. Henry offered the following conversation in the teacher's lounge in the lower campus of his elementary

school. The school has two campuses, one for primary grades (lower campus) and the other for upper elementary grades (upper campus). He relates,

You have to accept the fact that you are look upon as a role model or some father figure. I don't mind that. The kids just see something in you they like. Because plenty of time the children say, 'Daddy or I mean Mr. Henry'...and the kids says 'I don't know why I keep calling you daddy.' But I understand. This is the person you see and you are around all the time. A person who talks and listens to you like your daddy so I understand. Actually the boys... the girls usually hug me more and stuff but the boys will be like 'Daddy or I mean Mr. Henry.'

Mr. Henry suggests that his role in the lives of his Black male students is complementary to that of his Black male kindergarteners' biological fathers because his Black male kindergartners see something in him they admire, and his active presence in their lives reminds them of their fathers. This view of Black fathers as nurturing is missing from the extant literature (Coles & Green, 2009). Because Mr. Henry knows the children's families and fathers, he perceives that they are also able to talk and listen to him in the same manner they talk to their biological fathers. Black teachers who are fictive kin also are often seen as admirable in the eyes of Black children, and have similar active presence in their lives beyond the four walls of school, which is complementary to that of their biological parents (Cook, 2010; Fordham, 1996). Moreover, culturally relevant teachers, according to Ladson-Billings (2009), are often admired by and maintain an active presence in the lives of Black children as they embrace their racial, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. Historically, Black men and women teachers have always been praiseworthy in the eyes of Black children and maintained active presence in their lives

(Cook, 2010; Dingus, 2006; Siddle-Walker, 1996; 2001). Siddle-Walker (1997, 2001) explains that during segregated Black education, Black teachers remained actively present in the lives of Black children, even after they graduated from high schools. For example, they supported Black students in their effort to pursue post-secondary education. For Black students who wanted to enter the job market, Black teachers (and administrators) found jobs for them, most of which were in the schoolhouse (Siddle-Walker, 2001). Likewise, Mr. Henry can be perceived as both fictive kin and culturally relevant pedagogue in the lives of his Black male kindergarteners.

In most cases, Black male teachers are positioned to believe they must take the role of fathers for Black boys instead of building on what Black fathers already offer to their sons (Brown, 2012). This occurs because most Black (and White teachers) stereotypically believe Black boys have no fathers at home (Brown, 2011). And for this reason, many Black male teachers (and administrators) see their roles as teaching Black boys to become ‘men’ (Howard, 2012). This deficit understanding permeates media and the popular press and leads to the establishment of most Black male mentoring programs, which draw from deficit perspectives about Black boys in response to so-called ‘absent’ Black fathers (Peters, 2001). When asked about how Mr. Henry is involved in the community during the focus group discussion, Mr. Boin suggested that Mr. Henry led a mentoring program at his school. However, it would have been good to probe further to learn about the nature of the mentoring program.

Critiquing Black male mentoring program is not intended to suggest that there are not any Black male mentoring programs that draw from dynamic perspectives regarding Black boys (Hopkins, 1997; Howard, 2014). Hopkins (1997) and Howard (2014) details

*My Brother's Keeper*, which is based in Detroit, Michigan that not only supports Black males in circumventing the academic atrocities associated with their miseducation in public K-12 school, but also provides Black male students an Afrocentric, sociocultural and sociopolitical understanding of who they are as Black male students. In other words, this program provides on-site tutoring to support and promote academic progress among Black male students in K-12 schools, while also providing a curriculum that encourages Black excellence as they come to understand who they are from an African-centered perspective (Hopkins, 1997). Drawing from the research of Hopkins (1997), Howard (2014) continues the trend of researching such Black male mentoring programs to support Black male students in schools and society writ large. His interest in continuing this work stems from conversations with Black mothers who seek to find solutions to aid their Black sons (Howard, 2014). Thus, when scholars maintain deficit rhetoric regarding how Black fathers (and mothers) are unconcerned about the wellbeing of their Black sons, they must be drawn to educational scholarship that suggests otherwise including the works of Hopkins (1997) and Howard (2014). Black parents are and have always been concerned about both the educational and social wellbeing of their Black children, particularly their Black sons (Howard, 2014; Reynold, 2008; Siddle-Walker, 1996, 2001). In this present study, many Black family members expressed their concerns about their Black sons in school and in society writ large, especially in light of some of the most recent tragedies/murders of Black males and White police officers who murdered them (Taylor, 2016). Mrs. Boin specifically noted that she was worried that White teachers and police officers would attempt to “dim [her] son’s light” because he was smart. Mrs.

Felice added to the list of concerns. She suggested she was worried about how her son Joshua would be treated as he matriculated through the public school system.

Although most deficit-oriented Black male mentoring programs are well intentioned, many focus on teaching Black males how to engage in the politics of respectability or the act of policing Black males in such a way they conform to White expectation for the Black (male) body (Peters, 2001). For example, a recent news story in Charleston, South Carolina's newspaper *The Post and Courier* highlights a Black male teacher who created a mentoring program at a local elementary school with the goal of teaching Black boys how 'to become gentlemen' (Turner, 2016). The Black male teacher explained that he created the program because the Black males in his school had no one at home to teach them how to become gentlemen. Similarly, Peters' (2001) work titled, *Inspired Learning: Why we must give children hope* details how he inspires Black males to learn by establishing a Gentlemen's Club. However, what is seemingly problematic about Peters' work is the politics of respectability around the Gentlemen's Club. That is, based on the Gentlemen Club's curriculum as illustrated in his book, Black male students are encouraged to conform to White norms and expectations for the Black (male) body (i.e., speaking and dressing properly). Moreover, they never come to understand who they are from an Afrocentric perspective, which is empowering, not demeaning (DuBois, 1903; Hopkins, 1997). In other words, his work does not build on Afrocentric constructions of Black masculinity where Black males are truly inspired to educate themselves about themselves and to develop sociopolitical consciousness. Ladson-Billings (2009) proposes that the sociopolitical consciousness dimension of culturally relevant is important to help Black children understand how they are raced and classed in

a racialized society where Black (male and female) lives do not matter. Such sociopolitical consciousness is essential to Black males in order to help them understand how they can challenge systemic racism, work against White Supremacy, and come to understand who they are as African people, to suggest the least (Coates, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Love, 2013). When Black boys and men are uncritical and/or lack sociopolitical consciousness they become victims of White Supremacy and racism in schools and society writ large (Coates, 2015; Dancy, 2014). During one of the formal interviews, Mr. Henry admits that he spends extra time with his Black male kindergartners to help them understand what it means to be Black and male in America. He admits that at the beginning of the school year, he shares with his family members (mostly Black mothers) that he will have higher expectations for his Black male students in light of what he personally knows about being Black and male in society. He suggests that most of the Black family members applaud him for doing so.

Furthermore, this idea of disregarding the innocence of Black male childhood is also another problematic idea (Dancy, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2011). In other words, Black boys are always forced to become men; whereas White male children are not expected to do the same in schools and society writ large (Ladson-Billings, 2011). Ladson-Billings (2011) argues that when Black boys are forced to become men, they face men-like consequences in schools and society. These consequences include, but are not limited to disproportionality in school discipline, excessive assignments to special education, and underrepresentation in gifted education (Bryan & Ford, 2014; Ferguson, 2000; Dancy, 2014; Losen, 2013). And, while many White (and Black) people love the plethora of Black male contribution to society (i.e., sports and music), they hate them at



the intersections of Blackness and maleness (Ladson-Billings, 2011; Howard, 2014).

Ladson-Billings (2011) and Howards (2014) refer to such idea as the love-hate binary in which society traps Black males. According to Mr. Henry, many of his White (and Black) colleagues enjoy him in his current capacity as a kindergarten teacher at Ponce De Leon in light of his pedagogies and positive interaction with children. During many of the observations, several of his colleagues and family members were curious about why I was observing Mr. Henry and his students, which always led me to explain the nature of this study. In the hallways and/or cafeteria, many of them commented, “We’re so glad to have him here.” “He’s so great with our children.” In fact, during the focus group discussion, Mrs. Boin noted that she was very surprised that many White families embraced Mr. Henry because of how rare it is to have a Black man teaching young White children. She further commented that most of the White family members enjoyed Mr. Henry adding diversity to the school and their children’s schooling experience. While White people may enjoy Mr. Henry in his current capacity as teacher, Black people including Black males have always been the poster child for White people’s diversity agenda (Orelus, 2013). Considering that Mr. Henry mentioned that he is the only Black male teacher on staff at Ponce De Leon, such may be the case. I also noticed the lack of teachers of color at the school during my observations. The idea that he is the only Black male teacher (among the few teachers of color) on faculty does not support the love they openly profess for him, but only demonstrates the hate (and distrust) most people have for Black men. In other words, they love him just enough to teach the children, to positively interact with them, and to add diversity to the faculty, but hate him (and other Black men) just enough to hire so few of them to teach at the school. While there are few

Black men teachers in the field of education (Lewis & Toldson, 2013; Sealey-Ruiz et al., 2014), there are enough Black male teachers to have more than one of them in a school environment (Bristol, 2014).

To be clear, Mr. Henry does not draw from deficit perspectives regarding Black parents. As he expresses how his Black male kindergartners admire him, and acknowledges his active presence in their lives, Mr. Henry also acknowledges how his students respect their parents and the active role they play in their lives. He further indicates such idea in a counter response to his Black male students who suggested they wish Mr. Henry were their fathers. He relates,

I tell them, ‘No you gotta a dad and I have met him and he is cool.’ I tell them, ‘Don’t go home saying that!’ (*laughs hysterically*). It is just funny that they do that but I just feel like... you know... they see you as somebody who could be a part of their family....somebody they like.

While providing such counter response to his Black male kindergartners, he supports the Black male kindergartners in his class in developing a dynamic perspective about their fathers. However, in most schools, Black males, like most Black children, internalize deficit rhetoric surrounding them and their families (Boutte & Johnson, 2013).

Noticing that many of his Black male students call him “Daddy,” Mr. Henry relates,

The funny part about it is a lot of the boys who say it, they have fathers at home. For most people, [it] would be strange because the fact that they are not from single-parent homes. The ones who usually say it have a father at home. They would say ‘Daddy or I mean Mr. Henry, I don’t know why I keep calling you

daddy. Hmm... some of them... hmm...some would even say I wish you were my daddy.

Additionally, during an observation inside of the classroom, Roland raised his hands in attempts to acquire Mr. Henry's attention to request permission to go the restroom. At that juncture, Roland and his classmates were working on a math activity called Numbers, Operations, Work, and Answer(*NOWA*). *NOWA* is a math technique Mr. Henry taught his students to help them better solve math problems. However, Mr. Henry, who was working with another student, did not notice Roland at that time. Roland yelled out, "Daddy, can I use the bathroom?" Without hesitation, Mr. Henry responded, "Yea, go quickly!" Mr. Henry did not realize that Roland had referred to him as "Daddy." At least, he never attempted to address it during the observation.

While Black male students refer to their teacher as "Daddy," they acknowledge the importance of that interaction with him, which reminds them of their biological "Daddy." This idea counters Brockenbrough's (2012) work entitled '*You ain't my daddy!*: Black male teachers and the politics of surrogate fatherhood' in which he argues that Black male students may not want Black male teachers to serve as father figures to them. Although this may be true in some cases (Brockenbrough, 2012), much of this work is conducted with Black male teachers who work in middle and high school settings. Thus, there is still a limited understanding regarding how Black male teachers feel regarding such construction and how Black male kindergarteners perceive their Black male teacher in early childhood spaces. However, based on how Black male kindergarteners and how Black male teachers respond to such construction in this study, Black male kindergarteners may want Black male teachers to be seen as complementing

their biological fathers. Likewise, Black male teachers may want to be perceived as complementary to the biological fathers of their Black male students, kindergartners in this case.

As mentioned by Mr. Henry, another important idea I also found both interesting and compelling is that the Black males kindergartners who refer to Mr. Henry as “Daddy” were mainly from two-parent Black family homes. Often the research literature construct Black boys who need role models are those who are from ‘single-parent homes’ where Black mothers are primarily caregivers (Brown, 2012). Black mothers are often seen as contributing to the demise of Black boys because they are stereotypically considered overbearing or hindering Black boys from accomplishing their ‘male roles’ and unable to raise Black males without the assistance of a Black male father (Brown, 2011, 2012). However, in this present study, Black male kindergarten students who are from two-parent homes also find a Role Model in Mr. Henry. Mrs. Boin also agrees that Black children from two parent homes need role models. She asserts as she describes her familial construction and discusses her son during a focus group discussion in Mr. Henry’s classroom, “We’re two parents at home but still outside of your dad you need male role models.” In so suggesting, she is not taking anything away from her husband’s ability as father, but values ways Mr. Henry compliments her husband. In the next section, I explore how Mr. Henry draws from the wisdom of his biological parents to support his Black male kindergarteners.

### **Drawing From the Wisdom of His Biological Black Parents**

Particularly rare in K-12 schools are teachers who draw from the cultural wealth of Black communities and families (Boutte & Hill, 2006). However, such is not the case for Mr. Henry. When describing himself as a teacher, like Mr. Javien, he suggests that he found the wisdom from his Black parents instrumental in his classroom as he comes to know, build relationships with, and support Black male (and other) kindergarteners. He explains,

Now they (referring to his Black male students) can say Mr. Henry know the name of my dog. Later on down the line when I have your [their] siblings, I will be able to recall that information about you. It seems like something basic but I think it goes a long way. You know my parents used to tell me about how important it is to get to know people...care for 'em (them)...you know...invest in 'em (them).

In his opinion, what seemingly is basic wisdom from his biological parents helps Mr. Henry understand the benefits of caring for and investing in people. He sees this as having long-term benefits to his teaching careers as he can use such knowledge about his students to connect with their siblings who he sees as one day becoming his students. Therefore, he perceives teaching as a communal practice, while also perceiving himself to have longevity in that school and community. Murrell (2000) refers to these kinds of teachers as “community teachers” (p. 338) They do not ‘rape’ and pillage communities at the expense of Black and Brown children (Morris, 2004). Culturally relevant teachers are also community-oriented teachers (Ladson-Billings, 2009). This is an important idea because most teachers do not see themselves as a part of the community, particularly

Black and other communities of color (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Additionally, they do not see teaching as a long-term commitment (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010b). This is particularly true in urban schools where there is a high rate of teacher turnover (Kozol, 2005). That is, teachers leave urban schools within 3 years of entering them (Milner, 2015). Thus, such high rate of teacher attrition negatively impacts the academic outcomes of Black and Brown students on many levels (Milner, 2010b). In the age of neoliberal pet projects where public resources including public schools are becoming privatized entities (Lipman, 2011), such attrition is becoming more pronounced in urban schools. Neoliberal projects including *Teach for America* are preparing aspiring teachers, most of whom are assigned to urban schools or schools with critical needs for teachers, in a short-term manner until they can find more lucrative careers and professional advancements; thus negatively impacting the academic outcomes of Black (and Brown) children (Lahann & Reagan, 2011). With such considerations in mind, rarely do educational scholars problematize the institutional barriers that preclude Black (and Brown) from social upward mobility (Oakes, 2005). Many Critical Race scholars (Gillborn, Ladson-Billings, & Taylor, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1999; Milner, 2010b; Taylor, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2009) argue that race and racism are at the core of such atrocities in the educational experiences of Black (and Brown children). Therefore, while White children enjoy their “china cabinet” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 121) educational experiences or the benefits of an educational system that will propel their upward mobility, Black (and Brown) children are placed in the “junk drawer” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 121) of their educational experiences and in most cases, are precluded from the advantages from which many White children benefit at their expense (Milner, 2010b). While all children

of color are placed at a disadvantage as a result, Black males are even more disenfranchised in schools and society writ large as they are the ‘lowest’ on every academic and social totem pole (Dancy, 2014; Ferguson, 2000). Considering that scholars (Blassingame, 1979; Frazier, 1932, 1948) draw from deficit constructions of Black masculinity to explain the academic and social atrocities of Black males in schools and society, rarely do they problematize institutional factors that preclude Black males from reaping the academic and social benefits, which their White male counterparts naturally enjoy (Dancy, 2015; Howard, 2014). Thus, to have a Black male teacher who sees his work as long-term in communities could prove beneficial to the outcomes of Black male students. Studies (Brown, 2012; Lynn, 2006a, b; Lynn et al., 1999) suggest that when Black (and other) teachers of color are retained in public schools, they positively influence the academic and social outcomes of Black children in schools. However, there is a distinct need to explore Black male teachers, particularly those who work in early childhood education settings and how their longevity in those spaces influence the academic and social outcomes of Black boys. Brown (2012) acknowledges that while educators have come to understand the importance of culturally relevant teachers in general to the academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness of Black children educators rarely know how culturally relevant Black male teachers influence academic outcomes of Black male students in K-12 schools. This is particularly true at the early childhood level where a limited number of studies, including this one, has been conducted on culturally relevant Black male teachers in early childhood education. Next, I examine how Mr. Henry engages in extended academic and social conversation with his Black male kindergartners.

## **Engaging In Extended Academic and Social Conversations With His Black Male Kindergarteners**

During one of the routine classroom visits, Mr. Henry and Joshua were engaged in an extended academic conversation. The following dialogic exchange took place during a math lesson where students were working on math facts.

**Josh:** Mr. Henry, you're really good at drawing basketballs. (*Mr. Henry was drawing basketballs to explain a math problem.*)

**Mr. Henry:** So, if I got five basketballs and I take away three, how many basketballs do I have?

**Josh:** Mr. Henry, I got a question.

**Mr. Henry:** Ok, Josh, hold on...we all might answer your question. So what sign do I need to use to take away?

**Josh:** Subtraction.

**Mr. Henry:** Very good Josh!

**Josh:** I got the answer.

**Mr. Henry:** I know you got the answer but give somebody else a chance.

**Josh** (*jumping out of his seat*): But, Mr. Henry.

**Mr. Henry:** Yes. Josh

**Josh:** If you draw another basketball, you will have six!

**Mr. Henry:** Yes, you are right but we ain't talking about six basketballs. We talkin about five. So, if you have five basketballs and you take away three, how many basketballs you got?

**Josh** (*yelling out the response before other students can respond*): Two! Two!



**Mr. Henry:** You're right! But, I told you about yelling out before you give somebody else a chance to answer. Next time, raise your hand so I will call on you.

**Josh:** Mr. Henry, I just know the answer.

**Mr. Henry:** Yes, I know you know the answer but you have to give other people a chance to answer just like you. I need to see that they know too. So, raise your hand next time so I can call on you.

**Josh:** Mr. Henry, can we do NOWA (standing for "Number, Operation, Work and Answer")? (*NOWA is a graphic organizer activity*).

**Mr. Henry:** Yes, Josh... if you give me a chance, we gonna do that...but give me a chance to get everybody on board.

*Approximately 10 minutes have passed, Mr. Henry proceeds to involve other students in the math lesson.*

**Mr. Henry:** Ok, so you got six basketballs and I add two to what you already got. How many basketballs do I have now?

During this interaction between Mr. Henry and Joshua, Joshua was highly engaged and motivated to participate by demonstrating his academic prowess in math. Often, Black male students may not demonstrate such interest in math and/or any content area, considering that most school content is taught in culturally irresponsible ways (Gay, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009). However, Mr. Henry engaged Joshua by infusing sports into the curriculum. During an interview with Joshua and other Black male kindergartners, Joshua, who is affectionately known as Josh among Mr. Henry and his peers, expressed his love for sports. His mother, Mrs. Felice, also acknowledges both

Josh's interest in sports and his academic prowess in math. She explained that Joshua does not like school, but like the idea of being able to connect with Mr. Henry, who is also a high school coach, through conversation around sports. This idea demonstrates that Mr. Henry does not limit his extended conversations to academic ones, but also includes sports. On another occasion, Mr. Henry had an extended conversation with the Black male students in his class on the playground about sports.

During an informal conversation in his classroom after school, Mr. Henry explained to me that he wears an Apple watch that often gives him sports updates regarding the latest trades and games scores. He expressed that during one of his class sessions, his watch sounded. He further explained that when this happens, his Black male students knew he was getting a sports update and he would share that particular update with them. Darryl William, a football player, was being traded by another team. He suggested that later he spoke with Mrs. Felice, who is also a teacher at his school. She mentioned that she had learned about the trade. Mrs. Felice could not wait to share what she had learned about the trade from the internet with Joshua. She eagerly shared the information with Joshua as he was entering his family's car to go home after school. When she shared the information, Joshua looked at her and said, "Oh, I already know. Mr. Henry told me."

Therefore, Mr. Henry, understanding Joshua's and some of the other Black boys' interest in sports, made the math lesson culturally relevant by infusing his interest in sports. This idea is particularly important because most Black males do not experience similar positive experiences in math because of the culturally irresponsible nature of mathematics in K-12 schools (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Tate, 1995). Despite a growing

educational knowledge base on culturally responsive math (Matthews, 2003; Tate, 1995), most teachers do not engage in it in K-12 classrooms, which is related to negative academic outcomes for Black males in math (and math-related content areas). Similarly, such ideas explain why few minoritized people, particularly males, are represented in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) areas as professional option. Roughly 3 percent of Black men (and women) hold jobs in STEM fields (National Science Foundation, 2010). Therefore, Black men are the most underrepresented in STEM-related professional areas (National Science Foundation, 2010). If teachers engage in culturally relevant math practices, it has potential to assist in increasing the number of Black male (and females) who enter STEM-related areas. Berry (2008) argues that Black male students' inaccessibility to upper level math courses further exacerbates their abilities to pursue STEM-related careers.

Many scholars may perceive, based on the previous dialogue between Mr. Henry and Joshua, that Mr. Henry was upset with Joshua in his attempt to encourage Joshua to allow other students to partake in the math lesson because of what may seem to be a stern approach in helping Joshua understand the importance of allowing everyone to participate in class. However, based on my observation, Mr. Henry was not upset, but was very patient with him, as both of them engaged in very spirited conversation. Mr. Henry seemingly enjoyed that Josh was interested in the math lesson to such a degree. In fact, Mr. Henry clearly understood Joshua's behavior. During one of the interviews when he was asked what he was worried about in the terms of the education of Black boys, Mr. Henry expresses his concerns:

Yes, I worry about the fact that how they fit in the school entity first. There aren't many chances for them to be Black boys. For example we ask 5, 6, and 7- year old boys to come to school for 7.5 hours and sit in a desk or on a small square on the carpet still and not bother anyone. We ask them to walk in straight lines down long hallways, sit quiet at lunch and during dismissal. It's most of the things we do that make school not a good place for Black boys. Then people discipline them for not following the rules that they think keep them in line....crazy! We should do more to meet the need of our Black boys.

Mr. Henry perceives schools as a site of Black suffering for Black boys. In other words, he understands from a structural perspective that schools are set-up in ways that position Black boys for failure. However, he suggests that adults punish Black males for a structure that is not designed to meet their needs. For decades, many scholars have studied how schools are sites of Black suffering for Black children in general (Boutte, 2015; King, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009). However, recently, there has been a rise in scholarship that specifically addresses the suffering of Black boys in schools and society writ large (Dancy, 2014; Ferguson, 2000; Howard, 2014; Kunjufu, 2012; Love, 2013). These studies have been helpful in identifying institutional barriers including race and racism that have and are negatively impacting the academic and social outcomes of Black boys in schools and society. In relation to Black boys, specific attention has been given to school discipline data, which suggest that Black boys are far more likely to be suspended and expelled from schools for subjective school-related infractions in comparison to their White male counterparts (Dancy, 2014; Losen, 2013; Schott Foundation, 2014). Such exclusionary practices lead to what many scholars (Bryan &

Ford, 2013; Dancy, 2014; Howard, 2014; Schott Foundation, 2014) refer to as the school-to-prison pipeline where Black and other males of color are systematically funneled into the judicial system. Such funneling limits the life chances of and opportunities for Black males, which produce damaging outcomes for them and their families in the future (Howard, 2014). While many scholars theorize the school-to-prison pipelines, I perceive schools to be prisons for Black boys in light of its current structure for them (see Howard, 2014).

To address Joshua, Mr. Henry needed to make the point regarding the importance of allowing everyone to participate in class. Lynn (2006a, b) proposes that culturally relevant teachers who are also considered ‘other fathers’ often demonstrate tough love and sternness towards Black children. In most classrooms, Black male students who demonstrate such interest in lessons through the interactional style Joshua used to show his excitement, interest, and motivation in the lesson are often considered a ‘discipline problem’ (Howard, 2014). In light of the current teacher demographic trends (Aud et al., 2014), which suggests that the majority of K-12 teachers are White, middle-class females, it is highly likely for Josh and other Black male students whose interactional styles are slightly different from those of their White male counterparts may be sent out of classrooms (Howard, 2014). Research studies have shown that most White teachers are fearful of and often misinterpret behaviors of Black children (Goff, Jackson, Di Leone, Culotta, & Di Tomasso, 2014; Wright, 2015). This is particularly true for Black boys who enter classrooms as “human kinds” (Brown, 2012, p. 296) or individuals who are already stereotyped before they enter classrooms. My particular focus on the behavior of Black boys is not to minimize how White (and Black) teachers misinterpret the

behaviors of Black girls. Black girls are suspended and expelled at somewhat similar rates as their Black male counterparts (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015). In comparison to White girls, Black girls are 6 times more likely to be suspended and expelled from school (Crenshaw et al., 2015). A recent incident in Columbia, South Carolina at Spring Valley High School helps educators understand how schools are becoming and have always been sites of Black female suffering, from a disciplinary (and academic) standpoint (Ford, Botelho, & Conlon, 2015). A school resource officer was invited to handle a minor school infraction pertaining to a Black female student who refused to relinquish her cellphone. After several attempts to retrieve the cellphone, the school resource officer tosses the Black female student across the room. She was suspended from school and arrested for disrupting the school environment. Several students, including a female student, who recorded the incident via cellphone were also arrested. Thus, for Black males and females, it is appropriate to draw from a question DuBois (1903) asked centuries ago, but still is relevant to how they are perceived in schools and society writ large, “How does it feel to be a problem? (p. 1)” Because schools and teachers are unfamiliar with and are unable to support the interactional styles of Black children (Boutte, 2015; Jackson, Boutte, & Wilson, 2013), many of them are disproportionately assigned to special education and labeled, particularly as Emotionally and Mentally Disabled (EMD) (Ford, 2013). Thus, in light of such assignments, Black children stereotypically become ‘a problem on top of problem’ in schools and special education classrooms as both entities become entry points to the school-to-prison pipeline, especially at the intersections of Blackness and maleness (Bryan et al., 2016; Howard, 2014). Thus, I further extend DuBois’ (1903) question to include

disproportional special education assignments, “How does it feel to be ‘a problem on top of a problem?’” Mr. Henry conveyed (perhaps tacitly) that he valued Joshua and thought he was smart. Even sharing the sports updates showed that Mr. Henry viewed Joshua as a person and also conveyed a common connection through sports. This is a wonderful validation of Joshua as a human being. Mr. Henry was not bothered by Josh’s continuing to shout out the answer. At the same time, he helped him learn the pragmatic rules for Mainstream American English- taking turns and raising his hands ( Hudley & Mallison, 2011).

In addition, Mr. Henry also engaged in an extended academic conversation with Roland during another classroom observation in a small group literacy circle. Mr. Henry invited a group of four students (one White boy, one White girl, one Black girl, and one Black boy) to his literacy table. This is a typical practice in his classroom, which he often facilitated at the back of classroom at a circular table while his teacher’s assistant worked with the larger group of remaining students. According to Mr. Henry, literacy circles provide him opportunities to work more intimately with each of his students to assist them in developing their reading skills. He selects students to join his group and does not engage in reading ability tracking to group students like most teachers.

During this particular literacy circle, Mr. Henry read the book entitled “Little Martin” to the group, which is a book about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drawing from the information in the book, Mr. Henry explained what segregation was and how it was enacted during Dr. King’s time. Using each child as an example, he informed Roland, the only Black male in the group, that he would not be able to attend school with Kate (White girl) and John (White boy). Roland began to ask about why such were the case.

Mr. Henry explained that laws prohibited Black and White interaction and supported the separation of White and Black people in public spaces. Mr. Henry continued to share that as a Black male teacher, he could not teach Kate and John during segregation. While Kate and John chimed in every now and then, Roland asked questions about segregation for about 10 minutes. Roland briskly asked questions one after the other “So you mean you couldn’t be their teacher?” and “I couldn’t play with Kate?” He seemed really interested in the conversation and Mr. Henry supported his interest by continuing to engage him. Mr. Henry further explained that as a society we made great progress, but still have to work towards even greater progress.

To continue to view Mr. Henry’s pedagogical practices through the lens of culturally relevant pedagogy, it is clear that he was helping his students develop critical consciousness, an important dimension of Ladson-Billing’s (2009) CRP framework as he engaged them in a race-focused conversation. The majoritarian story is that children do not understand issues of race and racism and other social inequities; however, according to Boutte et al. (2011), they do. Children are socialized from birth into these understandings from their family members, media, and other societal institutions (Harro, 2000; Nash & Miller, 2015). Nash and Miller (2015) contend that White children receive messages about their superiority everyday through commercials, catalogues, and even the church. Similar messages are sent to Black and Brown children about their inferiority through these institutions (Boutte, 2015; King, 2005; Nash & Miller, 2015).

Because Mr. Henry used the book, *Little Martin*, to engage in this conversation with students, many scholars may think that Mr. Henry is continuing the tokenization of Dr. Martin Luther King (West, 2015; West & Buschendorf, 2015). However, such is not



the case. Mr. Henry has used other books, which focus on important Black figures who are not tokenized including Ruby Bridges, Duke Ellington, and Babe Ruth, to name a few. He also introduces a Black unknown figure to his students every day to help his Black male (and female) students develop cultural competence. Since cultural competence includes learning about one's own culture and at least one other culture, according to Ladson-Billings (2009), he is helping all students develop cultural competence. In other words, cultural competence is an important component of culturally relevant pedagogy, as Black children should come to learn about Black cultural wealth and one other cultural experience (Ladson-Billings, 2009). This should not be problematic in public K-12 schools, as Black children are inundated with all other cultures, except their own (Bryan et al., 2016; King, 2005). During one of the informal interviews in his classroom after school, Mr. Henry explained that he engages in this practice because he notices that most Black children do not know their history and schools do not help them much to do so. He also suggests that school do not even help Black children understand who they are during celebrations including Black History that are set aside to celebrate Black excellence. He informed me that during Black History month, his school engages in "Multicultural Stories Month." He posits that this is a strategic way to ignore and downplay Black contributions to American history. Therefore, in order to push back against such moves to eradicate Black history, he introduces Black history every day. In fact, Mr. Henry's physical presence in his school is Black history because he represents the historical legacy of Black contributions to society. Mr. Henry represents an important counternarrative to his Black and White students who are socialized into negative perceptions regarding Black men (Bryan &

Ford, 2014). Bryan and Ford (2014) argue that White children need to see Black men teachers in classrooms to help them work against stereotypes regarding Black men in general.

Because Mr. Henry infuses Black culture into his classroom every day, it helps to shift the narrative regarding Black people in general (King, 2005). Ladson-Billings (1994/2009) argues that culturally relevant teachers should intentionally infuse the cultural wealth of their Black students in the curriculum on a daily basis. That is, culturally relevant teaching is not a touristic curriculum where teachers acknowledge Black cultural wealth in isolated, unsustainable ways; however, Black cultural wealth should be normalized in the curriculum in the same manner White cultural norms are embedded therein (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Furthermore, Critical race scholars Ladson-Billings and Tate (1999) convey that school curriculum is a form of ‘Whiteness as property’ or an unearned benefit/ privilege of being White, which leads to White people being the center of school and school curriculum and positively reflected therein. It also demonstrates the inherent racism that exists in schools and school curriculum that negatively impact Black and other students of color. In the following section, I examine how Mr. Henry understand how his life and the lives of his Black male kindergartners are critically raced and how he uses that understanding to influence curriculum.

### **Understanding How His Life and the Lives of His Black Male Kindergartners Are Critically Raced and Using Such Understanding to Influence Experiences in His Kindergarten Classroom**

Mr. Henry continuously speaks about his experiences being a Black male at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI), particularly within the School of Education in

the South, where he received preparation to become a teacher. He uses this experience to shape experiences for his Black male students in his classroom. He explained that during the experiences at the PWI, he was confronted with many racialized experiences.

I was enrolled in a Creative Experiences course. Again, I was the only African American in the course. The rest of the students were White females. The professor gave a writing assignment that required us [the class] to reflect on a topic from the course. One of the White female students asked if it were possible to reflect and write on the field experiences we did during the semester. The professor willingly agreed. I decided to consult with the White female student. We both wrote our reflections on our field experiences. I made every effort to make sure my paper was perfect before I gave it to the professor. When I received my paper, I was surprised. I got an “F”. The White female student with whom I consulted got an “A”. I was upset so I went to the Dean to protest my grade. As a result, the Dean agreed with me. My grade changed to a “B”.

Mr. Henry further noted that during his student teaching experiences, the Director of School Supervision promised him that he would be assigned a Black male teacher to serve as his coaching teacher. They suggested that he would have to travel at least 20 miles to get to the elementary school in George Hill County (pseudonym) where the Black male teacher worked, if he really wanted a Black male teacher to supervise him. Mr. Henry agreed that he would travel to the school where the Black male teacher worked. However, when he arrived at the school on the first day of his internship experiences, he discovered that he was not assigned to

a Black male teacher. His coaching teacher was a White female teacher. He further described the experiences as being one of the worst in his life as she refused to provide him professional advice and resources to be successful in his student teaching experience. At mid-semester, she gave him a failing grade. At that juncture, he was placed on an action plan. The action plan detailed goals including submitting lessons plans a week in advance and other goals (i.e. working with his teacher to prepare lessons) he needed to accomplish during the remaining of his experiences. He acknowledged that he accomplished all of the goals that were outlined in the action plan. At the final conference, the White female coaching teacher still recommended that he fail his internship experience. However, his practicum supervisor decided against that option and allowed him to pass because he had accomplished all of the recommended goals previously indicated at the mid-semester conference. Mr. Henry suggested that at the end of his student teaching experience at the elementary school, the principal and his staff threw a party to celebrate his accomplishments and his White female coaching teacher refused to attend.

Mr. Henry suggested that he faced many racialized incidents during his time in his pre-service teacher education program that made it difficult in most cases for him to succeed. Many scholars (Bryan & Browder, 2013; Harper, 2015; Strayhorn, 2010; Warren, 2012) have explored the collegiate experiences of Black male collegians at PWIs, indicating that Black male collegians are faced with racial microaggressions and other institutional challenges that make it difficult to successfully matriculate through these institutions. This idea could possibly explain

one reason why few Black male collegians graduate from PWIs. And, while higher educational officials are aware of such low graduation rates among Black male collegians, little efforts have been made to support Black male collegians in general (Harper, 2012; Kim & Hargrove, 2013). However, for Black males who aspire to become teachers, some Schools of Education have instituted retention efforts such as the *Call Me Mister* Program to support Black male collegians. However, the *Call Me Mister* program is not readily available at most PWIs (Jones and Jenkins, 2012). The majority of the *Call Me Mister* Programs are located on the campuses of Historically Black Colleges that already, in most cases, provide a supportive environment for Black males in general. Black male collegians are more likely to graduate from HBCUs than PWIs (Bryan et al., in press Collins, Davis, Hunter, & Hilton, 2013; Irvine & Fenwick, 2011). Moreover, although there is a growing body of research on Black male collegians and their experiences in pre-service teacher education programs (Bryan & Browder, 2013; Warren, 2012), more studies are needed to ensure preservice teacher education programs at PWIs cater to the needs and support Black male collegians as they navigate these challenging terrains. Particularly, more studies are needed to explore aspiring Black male teachers and their coaching and supervision experiences with White female coaching teachers. This is an important consideration as the majority of in-service teachers are White, middle-class females (Aud et al., 2014; Bryan et al., 2015). Thus, this idea suggests that aspiring Black male teachers are more likely to be supervised and coached by White teachers than Black male (and female) teachers (Bryan et al., in press).

Because of these racialized incidents in his pre-service education and his lived realities, Mr. Henry is committed to providing experiences in his classroom to support, build pride, and maintain high expectations for his Black male kindergarteners. He relates,

So this is why I spent a lot of time with my Black male students, basically trying to give them what they need in my classroom because my experience could be their experience one day. Basically, I let them know to have high expectations and pride for themselves because being a Black male ain't easy.

Drawing from his personal lived experiences, Mr. Henry understands the complexities of being Black and male. This idea is not to suggest that Black males are a monolithic group (Brockenbrough, 2011; Lynn, 2006a, b). It is clear that there is diversity among Black males, even those who enter classrooms to teach (Brockenbrough, 2011, 2012a, b). However, Mr. Henry knows first-hand how issues of race and racism shape the lives of Black males in similar ways. Thus, he spends time building pride among and maintaining high expectations for his Black male kindergarteners. For Black males like Black children in general, building pride and maintaining high expectations for Black males are often missing from K-12 classrooms, which explains why many scholars call for Afrocentric and culturally relevant/responsive classrooms (Boutte, 2015; Gay, 2006; King, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Perry et al., 2003). Therefore, having Black male teachers who build pride among and have high expectations for Black male students is a great attempt at supporting Black male students, but it is also not enough as Black male teachers, like Black teachers in general, do not have control over the institutional barriers Black male kindergartener and other students are most likely to face in racialized

schools and society writ large (Sleeter & Milner, 2011). I now turn to explore ways Mr. Henry integrates Black music into his early childhood classroom.

### **Using Black Music to Make Learning Meaningful to His Black Male**

#### **Kindergarteners**

On several occasions, Mr. Henry infused Black music in the form of hip-hop and jazz music into the curriculum. The integration of such music forms served two different functions in his classroom. During my first observation in his classroom, I noticed his use of hip-hop music, which at this point was used to provide his Black male and other kindergarteners what Mr. Henry referred to as a ‘brain break.’ Consider what I observed during Mr. Henry’s integration of hip-hop music to serve as ‘brain breaks’: It was approximately 9:20 a.m. Mr. Henry asked his students to place their chairs under the desks and invited students to the middle of the carpet. A Black male student (Mansa) was asked to select from a list of hip-hop videos that were visible on the Smartboard. Mansa selected the song entitled “Hip-hop Tooty Ta.” Mr. Henry encouraged all the students to engage in some type of movement. He stated, “No one should be standing around. Everyone knows how to dance.” All of the students began to dance for about five minutes. Mr. Henry, then invited them to return to their seats.

From what I gathered based on his explanation after I followed-up with him during his planning period, the purpose of the ‘brain break’ was to provide his students an opportunity to relax in between lessons and activities. Mr. Henry noted that he found benefits in ‘brain break’ activities because it enabled his students, particularly his Black male students to focus more during lessons. During an informal conversation in his classroom afterschool, he explains that most football coaches are starting to use hip-hop

music with football players during physical workout sessions. Mr. Henry is a high school assistant football coach in his school district. He further adds that the purpose of using hip-hop music during physical workout is to encourage football players “to go harder.” He asked,

Think about what you do when you’re at the gym and you hear the music playing? You tend to work out harder, right? So, it’s the same thing on the football field and in the classroom. I want my students to go harder.

In other words, Mr. Henry perceived that hip-hop music could serve as a motivational tool for his student to encourage them to work harder in the classroom. While there is developing knowledge base regarding hip-hop music in K-12 schools (Emdin, 2010; Hill, 2009; Love, 2015), there is limited understanding regarding hip-hop in the early childhood education, particularly for the use of providing young children ‘brain breaks’ and motivational tools during the instructional process. However, there is a growing body of literature in school counseling where school counselors are using hip-hop music as a therapeutic tool to support students during school counseling sessions (Washington, 2015). Therefore, there is a need to further explore hip-hop as ‘brain breaks’ and motivational tools in kindergarten classroom, particularly for Black male kindergarteners whose identities are shaped by these cultural forms.

On another occasion, Mr. Henry integrated Black music to facilitate a whole-class literacy circle where he first read a book on Duke Ellington to his students and then played an accompanying CD so that his Black male and other students could become familiar with the jazz sounds of Duke Ellington. During the lesson, Mr. Henry asked the



students if they heard about Duke Ellington and his music before. The majority of the students responded in the negative, even his Black male (and female) students. Because of the ways Black children have been marginalized in K-12 schools, Black music and other Black cultural forms have also been marginalized (Hill, 2009). Black (and White) children can attend K-12 schools for 12 years, without being introduced to neither Black literature nor music that highlights Black ingenuity. This is an intentional agenda in schools to maintain the status quo regarding whose culture counts in school and society (Souto-Manning, 2014). More importantly, it is an agenda to maintain White supremacy (DuBois, 1903; Woodson, 1933). Culturally relevant teachers help students value Black cultural norms and traditions in K-12 classrooms for the purposes of promoting academic success, developing their cultural competence, and building sociopolitical awareness, which are missing components in the educational process of most Black (and White) children (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Mr. Henry understands such ideas and ensures that Black traditions, intellectual, and cultural ways of knowing are included in the classroom. Although I have already shared some examples, I turn to more examples from Black male kindergarteners' perceptions of the identities and pedagogical styles of Mr. Henry.

### **Black Male Kindergarteners on Mr. Henry**

#### **Facilitating Culturally Relevant and Black Masculine Literacy Practices**

When asked about his favorite school subject during a focus group discussion in Mr. Henry's classroom, Mario expresses that he enjoys "calendar" or what Kriete and Davis (2014) refer to as morning meeting. He also posits that Mr. Henry enables him to explore literacy and hip-hop music. He noted that Mr. Henry allowed him "to do stuff" he

never tried before as he is allowed to construct rap songs from the words of one of his favorite books and listen to CDs that connects reading to hip-hop. He explains,

**Mario:** He also lets us do stuff...like when it's time to do Smart math...because we get to do stuff...learn stuff...and do stuff we never tried before.

**Bryan:** Ok! So he teaches you stuff you have never tried before? Like what for example?

**Mario :** *Give a Dog a Bone.*

**Bryan:** What's *Give a Dog a Bone*?

**Mario:** It's a book we read in class sometimes. We can check it out of the library if we wanna take it home.

**Bryan:** What's interesting about *Give a Dog a Bone*?

**Mario:** It tells what a dog want and what you can give him.

**Bryan:** Like what for example? Can you think about anything from the book?

**Mario:** Like if you give a dog a bone, you gotta give him water. We can make a rap out of the words.

**Bryan:** What do you mean?

**Mario:** Because the words rhyme.

**Bryan:** So how do you make a rap out of the words?

**Mario:** Just put the rhyming words together

**Bryan:** So, what does Mr. Henry say about you making a rap?

**Mario:** He lets us listen to the CD.

**Bryan:** Oh, so Mr. Henry allows you to rap?

**Mario:** Yea, kinda!

Moreover, during an observation on the school's playground after lunch, Mario and Roland were running and were also challenging each other regarding who could make the most rhyming words. They were using words (i.e., "big," "dig," and "pig") I saw on the classroom's sight word wall. I noticed this once I re-entered the classroom. Roland moved his hand and head in a way that suggested that he had music in his head. I later asked Roland about the activity once they returned to the classroom. He suggested that they were playing a "rhyming game."

On one hand, Mario suggested that his teacher integrates hip-hop into literacy. However, Mario explains that he is able to construct hip-hop music as he puts the "rhyming words" together that he acquires from his favorite book. Both Roland and Mario were engaged in a similar "hip-hop style" activity on the playground, which were inspired by the sight words Mr. Henry taught them. At that juncture, Mario and Roland were engaged in higher order thinking activities as they engaged in activities where they put rhyming words together to make a hip-hop rhymes/songs. Scholars contend that when students are able to construct knowledge while learning, they are using higher order thinking skills (Conklin, 2011). While such is the case, many hip-hop scholars also suggest that when students construct in such a way, they engage in freestyling (Alim, 2006; Edwards, 2009; Hill, 2009). Freestyling is the act of naturally improvising lyrics without any previous preparation (Edwards, 2009). As they engaged in a rhyming word battles, Roland and Mario could be perceived as engaging in a cypher—the cyclical style of rapping one after the other during rap battle (Edwards, 2009). Because hip-hop

pedagogy and other Afrocentric pedagogies and practices have been marginalized in K-12 schools (Hill, 2009; King, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2009), many educators may not suggest that freestyling and engaging in cyphers are higher order thinking skills, despite a research study indicating that individuals who engage in freestyling, cyphers, and any hip-hop form have the highest average vocabulary (Musixmatch, 2015). Therefore, hip-hop music/pedagogy may prove to be a useful tool to increase the vocabulary of Black male students, as they must also have access to what Delpit (1995) refers to as “the language of power” (p. 26). Considering that Ladson-Billings (2014) encourages educators to support the global identities of Black and Brown children as they engage in the remix of culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0, my study explore ways teachers can integrate hip-hop music, freestyling and engaging in cyphers in particular, into literacy practices to support Black male kindergarteners whose identities are informed by hip-hop music. Similarly, considering that play is an important component of the early childhood classroom (Pizzolongo, 2014), my study demonstrates ways Black boys’ play is informed by hip-hop and ways Black male teachers facilitate such play.

While integrating hip-hop music into literacy practices is a culturally relevant practice because it uses cultural referents to build a bridge between what students know and need to know (Ladson-Billings, 2009, 2014; Paris, 2012), it is also considered a form of Black masculine literacy, which is informed by Black male identities. Rarely do scholars examine how literacy practices of Black males are informed by both their identities inclusive of both Blackness and maleness (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009). Thus, my study explores how the integration of hip-hop and literacy supports the Black masculine literacy learning styles and practices of Black male students in kindergarten

classrooms. In light of deficit constructions of Black masculinity, Black males who engage in hip-hop or hip-hop styles are stereotypically perceived as violent, dangerous, and suspicious thugs (Love, 2013). Love (2013) argues that drawing from negative stereotypes at the intersections of Black, male, and hip-hop, George Zimmerman perceived Trayvon Martin's hip-hop dress style to be a threat to his personal safety and wellbeing. Therefore, I wonder how Roland and Mario are perceived since they used hip-hop to support and/or reinforce their learning in their kindergarten classroom.

From a Critical Race theoretical perspective, Black male kindergarteners whose play is informed by hip-hop music provide a counter to dominate narratives that uphold the play styles of White, middle-class children. Like most theories in early childhood education, many play theories and research studies on play are constructed around ways White children engage in play (Anderson, Spainhower, & Sharp, 2014; Pizzolongo, 2014; Singer, 2013). If Black children are addressed in the play literature, they are often perceived as unsafe, violent, and beyond rough and tumble play (Singer, 2013).

Therefore, the integration of hip-hop and play serve as important considerations to educational research, particularly for Black male kindergarteners whose identities, like some Black children in general, are most likely informed by hip-hop and whose play styles are not valued in early childhood classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

In light of culturally relevant pedagogy, scholars may argue that the sociopolitical consciousness component may be missing in the ways Roland and Mario engage in hip-hop pedagogy in their kindergarten classroom. However, such is not the case. The sociopolitical component of culturally relevant pedagogy enables students to understand how they are positioned in a racialized, gendered, and classed society and challenge such

systems within their everyday lived experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Therefore, Roland and Mario are challenging the traditional boundaries of teaching and learning in the early childhood classroom, as culturally relevant and hip-hop and other Afrocentric pedagogies are not readily available in most early childhood classrooms (Boutte, 2015; King, 2005; Love, 2015). This is also coupled with other aspects of Mr. H's instruction such as reading and discussing liberation literature. In the next section, I examine Black male kindergarteners' perception of Mr. Henry as one who engages in play and relates to them in their early childhood classroom.

### **Playing With and Relating to His Black Male Kindergarteners Inside and Outside of the Classroom**

According to Roland, "Sometimes Mr. Henry come outside with us to see how we doing and sometimes he play with us and also he usually make us do stuff fun. He plays football with us too. He used to play football like me when he was a kid." Roland's comments indicates that the role Mr. Henry plays in his life goes beyond what happens academically in the classroom. That is, Mr. Henry finds time to play and relate to him outside of the classroom. Specifically, Roland suggests that Mr. Henry plays football with his classmates and him. On one occasion inside of the classroom, Mr. Henry also played golf with his Black male students to help them learn sight words. The other students were engaged in a literacy circle with the teacher's assistant, Mrs. Day.

In light of the scarcity of Black male teachers and the overwhelming presence of White female teachers in the field of education (Sealey-Ruiz, Lewis & Toldson, 2014), Roland may not have the opportunity to relate to his teachers in similar ways. This idea is not to suggest that all Black male teachers are able to connect with Black male students

through sports, since Black males are not a monolithic group and enter public school classrooms with many social locations that may or may not enable them to connect with Black boys (Brockenbrough, 2012a, b; Martino, 2008). Because of most Black males' interest in sports and other athletic activities (Howard, 2014), Byrd, Butler, Lewis, Bonner, Rutledge and Watson (2011) sees the potential in recruiting Black male athletes to become teachers in K-12 schools. Mr. Henry is a former high school and college athlete and a current assistant football coach. Although there are limited research studies on the recruitment and retention of Black male teacher athletes to K-12 education, my study explores how a Black male teacher who is a former athlete and current assistant football use sports to facilitate teaching and learning in the early childhood classroom. Since sports, like hip-hop, are and are becoming global identities for Black (and other) males of color, this becomes an important exploration in the educational literature. Moreover, using sports can possibly make teaching and learning more gender relevant for Black and other boys of color (Bristol, 2015). Like Black male teachers are not a monolithic group (Brockenbrough, 2011), Black male students are not a monolithic group and enter schools with a plethora of social identities (Howard, 2014). Therefore, relating to Black male students through sports should not be limited to and is not a panacea for playing with and relating to them in early childhood classrooms. Howard (2014) critiques the Black male sports phenomenon in that he argues that Black male (and their parents) should invest more time in academic pursuits, instead of sport. He suggests that sports for Black boys are not different than the auction block for enslaved African (Howard, 2014). That is, "Black male bodies were instructed, marveled at, prodded, analyzed, and sized up in a fashion that was almost similar to what enslaved Africans encountered prior to being

sold on auction block (p. 71).” The voices of Mr. Henry’s Black male students have been heard loudly and clearly; thus, exploring the perceptions of Black family members is another goal in the section to follow.

### **Black Family Members on Mr. Henry**

#### **Representing Positive Images of Black Manhood for Black Male Kindergartners**

When asked her perceptions regarding Mr. Henry during a focus group discussion in Mr. Henry’s class, Mrs. Felice indicates that she desired to have her son, Joshua, in Mr. Henry’s class because she wanted him to see a professional Black man who teaches. Although she contends that her husband is a professional Black man, she wanted Joshua to see that Black men can also become teachers, despite the fact that few Black men are teachers. Therefore, she perceived Mr. Henry as an asset to help shift the narrative regarding who can become teachers in K-12 schools. This is an important idea considering that most teachers, particularly in early childhood education, are White middle class females (Aud et al., 2014). The current teacher demographic trend sends negative messages about who counts as and who can become teachers in early childhood education and public K-12 schools in general. According to Bryan and Browder (2013),

The inclusion of more [Black] males in the early years has the potential to benefit society, the profession, and Black (and White) children. By having more male teachers in early childhood, it can help dismantle the hegemonic forces that limit occupational choices for women and men in society (Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011); and it can significantly impact society’s perceptions of gender-specific occupations. This is a complex dynamic that could have a positive effect on paradigm shifts in philosophy, theory, research, and policy. Also, more



occupational choices emerge for men when dominant ideologies of gender and occupations decrease (p. 2).

Therefore, having more Black male teachers at the early childhood levels is beneficial to all children, particularly White children who are socialized to fear, hate, and disrespect Black men in general (Bryan & Ford, 2014).

Mrs. Boin perceived Mr. Henry to be a positive role model who provided Roland motivation to come to school, which were important characteristics to have in her eyes.

My son [Roland] isn't very interested in school and because he doesn't like school Mr. Henry was a motivator for him to go there. Like I would say, 'You are going to school to see Mr. Henry.' Then, he'll say, 'Ok, I'll go.' I like that he has a good relationship like with all the students. I've heard that from other parents too. Overall, it's been a positive experience.

When Mrs. Boin speaks about how disinterested her son is in schooling and how Mr. Henry provides him that motivation to come, she basically describes the hegemony of the schooling process and how oppressive it is for Black males and other students of color. In other words, Black boys, like Black children receive too much school, and too little education (Shujaa, 1994). Shujaa (1994) acknowledges the differences between school and education. On one hand, schooling is a process that is simply designed to marginalize African-centered educational practices in order to maintain the status quo, which upholds existing power structures that provide opportunities for some at the expense of others (Shujaa, 1994). On the other hand, education "is the process of transmitting from one generation to the next knowledge of the values, aesthetics, spiritual beliefs, and all things that give a particular cultural orientation its uniqueness" (p. 15).

From a Black masculinity perspective, for Black boys, public schools can be oppressive, considering that Black boys are stereotypically positioned to need more schooling than education as a way to discipline and control their bodies (Dancy & Brown, 2012; Kunjufu, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2011). Because Mr. Henry upholds education and not schooling, I understand why he motivates Roland to come to school. Culturally relevant teachers and fictive kin offer education instead of schooling (Cook, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Often, teachers have to challenge schooling to provide education (Milner, 2010b). In other words, culturally relevant teachers and Black teachers who are fictive kin have to work against the cultural norms of the school to provide education to Black children. Moreover, Coates (2015), in his work *Between the World and Me*, describes the difference between the school and the library. The former, he argues, limited his potential to come to know himself; whereas, the latter, because of access to a variety of books and other Black intellectual property, helped him to come to understand who he is as a cultural being in a White society (Coates, 2015). In the next section, I examine Black family members' perception of Mr. Henry as a pedagogue who demonstrates care and concern for their Black sons.

### **Demonstrating Intentional Care and Concern for the Academic and Social Wellbeing of His Black Male Students.**

Cook (2010) contends that Black teachers who are fictive kin demonstrate intentional care and concern for not only the academic wellbeing of Black children, but also their social wellbeing. During a focus group discussion, Mrs. Boin and Mrs. Felice described Mr. Henry in such a way. Consider Mrs. Boin comments:

Well, everyday...it's just so happen that we [referring to she and her son] arrive early to school and we would arrive at the same time Mr. Henry would arrive...around the same time every day. He would always ...even if he was all the way in the school, he would stop and walk back to my car and gather up my son and walk him in the building. He doesn't have to do that but when he saw that he was coming he would come back and walk and walk with him and give him a big hug. That just showed me a lot because he didn't have to do that. He was walking him to the morning program so he was not even going to the same place in the building in the morning but he would take him in and talk to him about his morning. I really appreciated that.

In other words, Mrs. Boin conveys Mr. Henry's intentional care and concern about her son that drives him to take time out of his morning to interact with him in a very positive way. Clearly, in most schools, this is not the experience of Black boys as they are targeted as disciplinary problems the moment they enter schools (Howard, 2014). That is, school administrators and other officials intentionally aim to point out what is 'wrong' about Black boys, instead of what is right about them (Ferguson, 2000). Deficit constructions of Black masculinity, stereotypes, and lack of knowledge about them positions Black males to experience schools and society in some of the worst ways (Dancy, 2014; Ferguson, 2000; Howard, 2014; Washington, 2015). A growing body of research studies on Black males documents such ideas (Anderson, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Howard, 2014). To be successful in schools, Black boys need teachers who do not see them from deficit perspectives, but instead dynamic ones (Howard, 2014). Therefore, Howard (2014) and Hopkins (1997) call for a paradigm shift in the way teachers and

other school officials view Black boys so that they are able to demonstrate they care for them in the face of the majoritarian messages that suggest otherwise.

Mrs. Felice also notices Mr. Henry's care and concern for her son's academic wellbeing. During a focus group discussion she explained that Mr. Henry intentionally checked Joshua's reading log because he knew Joshua was not very fond of reading. She suggested that Mr. Henry did "little things" to encourage him to read. For example, he often gave Joshua books to take home to read to his mom, and alerted him that he would test him on them the next day.

While teachers generally should care for and be concerned about the academic progress of their students (Boutte, 2015; Bryan et al., 2016; Gay, 2006; Ladson-Billing, 2009), this is not typically the case, especially for Black boys in K-12 schools (Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2015). Because most teachers are underprepared to work with Black males in K-12 schools, they allow them to underperform in classrooms (Howard, 2014). However, culturally relevant teachers, like Mr. Henry, are readily available to push, encourage, and motivate Black boys to meet academic goals. According to Cook (2010), Black teachers who are fictive kin teach Black children to be resilient in the face of struggle. Thus, because reading was a struggle for Joshua, Mr. Henry provided him tools to become resilient in order to meet goals in that one academic area. That is, he continued to provide books to him as supplemental reading so that he could practice reading at home with his mom. This is an important phenomenon because Black boys are stereotypically considered unable to read (Haddix, 2009). However, it is not that they cannot read, they are not provided the appropriate skills, tools, motivation and encouragement to do so (Kirkland, 2011). In the section to follow, Black family members

perceive Mr. Henry to be a Role Model who minimizes their fear and distrust for White teachers.

### **Minimizing the Fear and Distrust Black Family Members Have for White Teachers**

What was most problematic during a focus group discussion in Mr. Henry's class is the way these Black mothers articulated their concerns for their Black son, particularly as it relates to White teachers. When these mothers spoke, I sensed anxiety as they spoke about their concerns for their sons. Consider the following dialogic exchange Mrs. Felice initiated by Mrs. Felice when asked about concerns she had regarding her son:

**Mrs. Felice:** I think what concerns me most as he gets older...you know what...not even as he gets older. As he is going through school people will look at the fact that he is an African American male. And not necessarily him...it could be boys that look like him and perceive them to be a problem without giving him a chance to show him what kinda person he really is. A lot of it has to do with us as educators and how open are we to accepting and embracing every child. Some of us are more open to embracing other races more than others. That is why we need more Black male educators. That is one of my biggest fears is that somebody is going to judge him before they get to know him. You have teachers who would say, "Oh, you have seven Black boys."

**Bryan:** I'm going to ask you who do you envision that somebody being?

**Mrs. Felice:** Teachers who don't look like him. Honestly I do...only because I've seen it...and they have not necessarily done it to him for two reasons. One, because I'm there. Two, because they know me. I hear them talking about boys who look like him before they even ... I mean just from looking at the class

roster. I know it happens. That was one thing I didn't have to worry about with Mr. Henry.

Mrs. Felice expresses a fear and distrust about teachers who will judge not only her son and consider him a problem before they know him, but also other Black males as they become older in K-12 schools. Many scholars perceived that Black male students are stereotypically considered problematic before they even enter classroom (Bryan & Ford, 2014; Dancy, 2014; Hopkins, 1997; Howard, 2014). From a Black masculinity and intersectionality perspective, it is at the intersection of Blackness and maleness that cause most teachers to mistreat Black boys in K-12 classrooms (Dancy, 2014). She further articulated the need to have more Black male teachers like Mr. Henry in classrooms to avoid such practices of judging Black male students before they cross the threshold of classroom doors. This seemingly is her response to what she has witnessed relative to White teachers' interactional styles with Black boys. While Mrs. Felice concludes that increasing the number of Black male teachers in classrooms to avoid such mistreatment towards Black boys, many scholars disagree. Not all Black male teachers provide the safety Black male students need to protect them from the racialized atrocities in schools they face every day. Black male teachers are not a monolithic group (Brockenbrough, 2011, 2012). To readdress the Spring Valley incident mentioned earlier in which a police tossed a young Black girl across the classroom for refusing to relinquish her cell phone, it is important to note that a Black male teacher was in charge of the classroom where the Black female student was brutally victimized. In such a case, there are at least two important ideas to consider. First, if he allowed a police officer to victimize a female in such a way, he could possibly allow him to do even worse to a Black male, considering

that Black males are seen as problematic before they really ‘cause a problem’ (Coates, 2014; Howard, 2014). Second, if it were a Black male student, the situation may have led to his death in light of the fact that at the time of this present study, many police officers have been responsible for the horrendous slaughtering of Black males in society (Berry & Stovall, 2013; Love, 2013). Nevertheless, I understand Mrs. Felice’s reasons for wanting more Black males in K-12 classroom like Mr. Henry. Most Black male teachers, particularly those who are culturally relevant, prefer to work with Black boys and provide them the academic and social safety they need to survive in K-12 schools (Brown, 2012; Lewis & Toldson, 2013; Lynn et al., 1999). Bristol (2015) suggests that there should not be an intentional agenda to recruit any Black male to K-12 classrooms, but an agenda to recruit and retain those who use culturally and gender relevant approaches to support Black males in classrooms.

Mrs. Felice also speaks to issues where teachers use their class rosters to determine which student they want and do not want in their classrooms. She explains that some of the White teachers in her school count the number of Black males listed on their class rosters. This leads to name discrimination. While name discrimination has always been an issue for Black people in general (Betrand & Sendhill, 2003), my study explores name discrimination in K-12 school settings, particularly in early childhood classrooms. Name discrimination is a form of racial microaggression that negatively impacts the ways Black boys experience school. In other words, for Black adults, name discrimination has been used to deny opportunities including jobs (Betrand & Sendhill, 2003); however, for Black male students in this present study, name discrimination has been used to deny them access to classrooms. In light of such concerns, studies are needed to further

explore such phenomenon in early childhood classroom and K-12 schools in general. Sadly, the intersections of Black and male produce negative consequences and experiences for Black males in K-12 schools that are not readily faced by White male counterparts (Howard, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2011).

While some White teachers claim to take a colorblind approach to teaching and learning (Price-Dennis & Souto-Manning, 2011; Siwatu, Frazier, Osaghae, & Starker, 2011; Milner, 2010b), it is evident in this present study that they are not colorblind as they racialized the names of their Black male students. Critical race scholars argue against colorblind ideologies that suggest that people do not see race and other social identities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1999; Milner, 2010a, b, 2015). Race and racism are always at the forefront of the lived experiences of Black (and Brown) people, particularly in societal institutions including schools (Bell, 1988, Boutte, 2015; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1999). As it is evident, the intersections of Black and male exacerbate issues of race and racism in American society for Black males (Howard, 2014).

Mrs. Boin expresses similar fear/ concern for her son. Consider the following dialogic exchange as she expresses her intense fear:

**Mrs. Boin:** Well, I am very concerned about my son because of recent event and race relations and being killed and shot in the streets. I'm raising a black man and a black youth. That concerns me tremendously...his safety. Being stigmatized and generalized because he is a Black male that worries me all the time. I try to raise my son accordingly acknowledging those fears but that scares the death out of me. I also worry because my son is Black and very smart at some point someone will try to dim his light because he is very intelligent. It's very scary for a lot of



people whether we want to admit it or not. I'm afraid someone will make him afraid to be who he is.

**Bryan:** Who do you envision stigmatizing him?

**Mrs. Boin:** You know it could be any teacher or any police officer because some White teachers and officers don't seem to understand Black boys... that scares me.

Invoking Critical Race Theory, it becomes important to note that Mrs. Boin does not take a colorblind approach as she acknowledges her fear for her Black son in light of recent racialized tragedies (i.e. deaths of Black males at the hands of White cops) in the streets of America. Mrs. Boin's race-conscious approach serves as a counter-thought to dominant thought among most Black people. In other words, most Black middle-class families are and have become what West and Buschendorf (2014) refers to as 'niggerized' or they deny issues of race and racism and give up their Black prophetic voice to support post-racial ideologies. This is particularly true in the age of the election and re-election of America's first Black president, President Barack H. Obama (West & Buschendorf, 2014). By acknowledging she is raising a Black male helps us to know that she understands the misfortune of being one in schools and society as she fears that White teachers and police officers have the potential to "dim [her son's] light.

Considering the concerns of both Mrs. Felice and Mrs. Boin, Black family members, particularly mothers, need to be provided space to talk about their fears, concerns, and distrust relative to their Black sons and White teachers. Often, neither schools nor society provide them these therapeutic opportunities to help White people come to understand the fear, concerns and distrust Black mothers may have (Johnson,

2014). There is a need to conduct more educational research studies on Black mothers, sons, and the politics of distrust and fear in schools and society.

### **Chapter Summary**

In summary, Mr. Henry is a fictive father who possesses several identities and pedagogical styles in his kindergarten classroom. He draws from the wisdom of his biological parents to support Black male students, and engages in extended academic and social conversations with them. Likewise, he understands how his life and the lives of Black male students are critically, which becomes a springboard for him to influence experiences in the kindergarten classroom. A part of such influence in the classroom is his use of Black music meaningful to his Black male students. Although his voice is important in amplifying his identities and pedagogical, the voices of Mr. Henry's Black male students are equally important as they described him as a teacher who uses culturally relevant and Black masculine literacy practices in their classroom and plays and relate to them. The family members of his Black male kindergarteners finds him equally intriguing in that they perceive him to be a Role Model who represents positive images of Black manhood for his Black male student. They also perceive him to demonstrate intentional academic and social care and concern for their sons, while also minimizing Black family members' fear and distrust for White teachers.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### COUNTER-STORYTELLING WITH AND ABOUT MR. TAL

“He’s extremely hands-on. He is a solid teacher. I mean...my boy has only had two other teachers but he has the ability to pull him in. My boy has a lot of energy. He (Mr. Raton is referring to his son) has a lot of questions...very inquisitive. He (referring to Mr. Tal) addresses ...He understands that Braden is just Braden. He... he is not willing to lump him in with the rest of the class. He actually knows how to identify his strength and his needs as well as caters to that.” This comment made by Mr. Raton, Braden’s father, captures Mr. Tal’s identities and pedagogical styles in his kindergarten classroom. Seven themes were found regarding how Mr. Tal perceives his self-identity and pedagogical styles; one regarding how his Black male kindergarteners perceived him; and two regarding how Black family members perceived him. Each of these will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

#### **Seven Major Themes Regarding Mr. Tal’s Identities and Pedagogical Styles:**

- 1) Mr. Tal self-identifies as a fictive father who sees potential in his Black male kindergartners and builds on that potential.
- 2) He also perceives himself to be a fictive father who drew from the Black educational community in the form of *Call Me Mister* and the wisdom of former Black teachers to empower his students and community.

- 3) Because of his personal life and professional challenges, Mr. Tal self-identifies as a teacher who affirms, motivates, has high expectations for, and builds resilience among his Black male kindergarteners.
- 4) He also self-identifies as a teacher who understands the racialized challenges Black males face in schools and society and use that understanding to re-shape curricular and other experiences in his classroom.
- 5) Mr. Tal self-identifies as a teacher who engages in family-centered practices inside and outside of his classroom.

**Two Major Themes Regarding Mr. Tal's Identities and Pedagogical Styles as Perceived by Black Male Kindergarteners:**

- 6) Black male kindergarteners perceive Mr. Tal as a teacher who employs culturally relevant and Black masculine literacy practices in his kindergarten classroom.
- 7) Black male kindergarteners perceive Mr. Tal as a teacher who plays and relates to them inside and outside of the classroom.

**Two Major Themes Regarding Mr. Tal's Identities and Pedagogical Styles as Perceived by Black Family Members:**

- 8) Black family members perceive Mr. Tal to be a Role Model who represents positive images of Black manhood as assets for Black male kindergartners.
- 9) Black family members perceive Mr. Tal as a teacher who minimizes their distrust for White teachers and provides relief to them.

I start by discussing how Mr. Tal perceives his self-identity in his kindergarten classroom. However, before I engage such discourse, I introduce Table 8.1, which provides an excerpt of the profiles of Black students and family members in this chapter.

Table 8. 1

*Profile of Black Male Kindergartners and Family Members*

<b>Name of Family Member</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Familial Role</b>	<b>Kindergartener</b>
<b>Mr. Raton</b>	Black	Father	Braden
<b>Mrs. April</b>	Black	Mother	Cameron
<b>Mrs. Kathey</b>	White	Adopted Mother	Zion
<b>Mrs. Aretha</b>	Black	Grandmother	Maurice

### **Counter-Storytelling With Mr. Tal**

#### **Serving as a Fictive Father Who Sees Potential in His Black Male Kindergartners and Builds On That Potential**

During one of the interviews in his classroom, Mr. Tal constantly used the term role model in relations to how he perceives himself. Therefore, when asked to define that role, he described himself as a father figure who sees the best and the potential in his Black male kindergartners and one who guides them to discover that potential. The term “father figure” is widely used in the literature to describe the role of Black male teachers in K-12 schools (Brockenbrough, 2012a, b). Because most Black boys are often perceived to be products of single-parent homes, which are absent of Black fathers, scholars have used this term to describe Black male teachers as they take the role of the ‘missing Black male father’ (Brown, 2012a, b). Therefore, the term can be used to refer to both Black boys and fathers from a deficit perspective. However, although Mr. Tal uses the term “father figure,” he neither perceives his role as responding to deficit

perspectives regarding Black boys nor Black fathers. When describing his role and definition of a role model, he relays the following comments:

Well, someone who takes interest in the kids in such a way the kids can imitate and look up to them. A father figure who executes wisdom and uses that wisdom to guide children. He's also a coordinator of the minds...basically knowing how to bring all the stakeholders together to work with students. Someone who sees the best in you... the potential in you and build on that potential. I've had several role models when I was in school and still do have some people I look up to... people after whom I seek wisdom.

Mr. Tal sees his role as coordinating stakeholders to work with students so that they may reach their potential. During the focus group discussion in Mr. Tal's classroom, Mrs. Aretha noted Mr. Tal made her feel a part of what was going on in his classroom. She sensed his style of coordinating was different from what she had previously experienced with teachers in schools. She mentioned that because of this, she was impressed with him from the onset. Cook (2010) notes that teachers who coordinate with stakeholders to support the academic and social needs of Black students are fictive kin. In other words, fictive kin fosters collaboration with individuals who are invested in the academic and social wellbeing of Black children in schools and beyond them. Although Mr. Tal does not specify who these stakeholders are, by suggesting "all stakeholders," he does not put any limits on anyone who could possibly assist Black students meet their potential. From a Critical Race theoretical perspective, including "all stakeholders" to support Black children is a counter-narrative in so many ways because, in the dominant narrative, not everyone is perceived as being able to support the academic and social needs of Black

children. Mrs. April suggested, during the focus group discussion in Mr. Tal's classroom, that she never felt as involved in the educational process of her son before his being a student in Mr. Tal's class. Mr. Raton concurred with Mrs. April. Thus, these comments speak to Mr. Tal's commitment to involving all stakeholders in the educational process of children.

Often, Black family members, especially Black fathers, are stereotypically perceived as not being able to support their children (Brown 2011, 2012a, b; Boutte & Johnson, 2013). Being the only Black male present during the focus group discussion in Mr. Tal's classroom, Mr. Raton was very supportive of his son Braden. He was so supportive that he came to the focus group discussion before he had to work that evening, and also extended his stay during the conversation to support both Mr. Tal and Braden. Drawing from Critical Race Theory, Mr. Raton's presence serves as a counter to dominant narratives, which suggest that Black fathers are not supportive of their children.

Buford (2014) explains that there is a clarion call to recruit more Black male teachers to classrooms to support 'fatherless' Black boys (and girls) (Buford, 2014). When asked about his perception of Mr. Tal during a focus group discussion, Mr. Raton suggested that more Black male teachers should be recruited to classrooms to show Black boys they can become positive leaders. Mrs. April concurred with Mr. Raton's response during the focus group discussion. She relates, "Yea, we need more Black males teaching in school because they do things kinda different."

While Black fathers are stereotypically seen as 'incapable' of supporting their Black sons, Black mothers are stereotypically seen as supporting them too much to their own demise (Brown 2011, 2012). That is, 'overbearing' Black mothers are seen as

contributing to Black boys' inability to become self-sufficient (Brown, 2011). During the focus group conversation, Mr. Raton acknowledged that his mother was somewhat overbearing as a single mother. However, at the end of the focus group discussion, Mr. Raton made an unsolicited comment about his mother, which demonstrated his profound appreciation and respect for her, despite being 'overbearing' at times. He relates,

I didn't realize my mother's influence until I got older. So I kiss that woman every day I see her. And I'm thankful for who she was, although she wreck my nerves when I was younger... Because even if I didn't like it then, what she was trying to teach me, I can appreciate it now for making me who I am...and I really think that's the biggest thing.

Although the research literature stereotypically constructs single-mothers as overbearing (Brown, 2011), Mr. Raton provides a counternarrative, which suggested that he actually appreciated his single-mother being overbearing because her overly active presence in his life made him who he became as a man and a father. Thus, my study elicits the voices of Black males regarding single Black mothers.

In 2014, President Obama established a five-year initiative, called "My Brother's Keepers" to support Black and Latino males in schools and society. One of the main statistics (among many others) oft cited in the literature, media, and public press is the propensity of Black (and Latino) males to live in single-parent homes where fathers were absent and mothers were in-charge. During the focus group discussion, Mrs. April suggested that Black boys needed to be involved in activities including mentoring programs because they "don't have fathers" who spend time with them at home. From a Black masculinity perspective, it is essential to note that Mrs. April's comment is



grounded in deficit constructions of Black masculinity relative to Black boys and men. However, she seemingly is concerned about the plight of both Black men and boys.

Although Black male mentoring programs including Obama's *My Brother's Keeper* are well-intentioned initiatives, they lack sociopolitical components or often do not consider ways institutional and structural racism negatively shape the lived experiences of Black fathers and sons (Dumas, 2016; Noguera 2014). Instead, these programs teach Black (and Latino) boys how to play into White Supremacy and racism instead of working against them. In other words, these programs are not culturally relevant and do not help Black males come to understand how their lives are raced, gendered and class in a White Supremacist society. However, few studies (Hopkins, 1997; Howard, 2014) examine the deficit nature of Black male mentoring programs. According to Howard (2014), many Black mothers are interested in Black male mentoring programs to support their sons. During an informal conversation after the focus group discussion in Mr. Tal's class, Mrs. Aretha inquired about mentoring programs that Maurice could participate in during the summer to teach him social skills. She noted that Maurice has "a temper," which concerns her about his future interactions with police officers.

What is most interesting is that while many people problematize Black fathers and stereotypically perceive them as 'nonresidential' and 'absent' from the lives of their Black sons and Black mothers as 'overbearing' (Brown, 2012), Mr. Tal is seemingly more concerned with how Black male teachers are 'missing' and 'absent' from early childhood classrooms and the negative messages the virtual non-existence Black male teachers send to Black boys in K-12 schools. He acknowledged that he wanted to come

back to his home community to teach because during his schooling experiences, he never had a Black male teacher. Therefore, in light of the scarcity of Black male teachers, it is virtually possible for Black boys to attend 12 years of public K-12 schools, without experiencing the presence of a Black male (Bryan & Ford, 2014). However, what Mr. Tal suggested later in the interview was most compelling to me as a budding scholar who studies Black male teachers. He relates,

There's also no representation of Black male kindergarten teachers so Black boys get a lot of negative messages about Black men before they get to school and that could play a huge role in how they respond to Black male teachers as early as early childhood.

In other words, while some people criticize Black fathers (Cosby & Poussaint, 2007), Mr. Tal criticizes educational and societal institutions that keep Black men teachers out of the classroom (Bianco, Leech, & Mitchell, 2011; Bryan & Browder, 2013), particularly at the early childhood level. He suggests that these negative institutional messages give Black boys a negative perception regarding Black men teachers and how they, as Black boys, should respond to them.

During two of my observations, I noticed Mr. Tal's inability to connect with one of his Black male students, Vance. Vance was disinterested in school and the lesson during my class visits. Although Mr. Tal is an engaging, culturally relevant teacher, he struggled to engage Vance. On one occasion, Vance was determined to disengage other students, as they attempted to learn. He walked around the classroom and continued to meander throughout the room for approximately 10 minutes. As the participant-observer, I also attempted to connect with Vance to no avail. I tried to speak to him about the

importance of listening to his teacher. He ignored me. However, he seemingly had a strong connection with the teacher's assistant, a Black female in her mid-30's, Mrs. Peay. During Vance's initial interruption she was absent from the classroom, but later returned to discover he was interrupting the classroom. Immediately, she helped Vance to re-engage by embracing him and holding his hands to calm him. Because he knew he had a 'different' relationship with Vance, Mr. Tal often leveraged the capital Mrs. Peay brought to the classroom in this regard to support Vance. In sharing this observation, it is not my goal to indict neither Mr. Tal nor Vance. As a scholar who draws from the tenets of Critical Race Theory, I understand fully the institutional and structural nature of schools that make them complex for both Black male teachers and students. In fact, I like how Mr. Tal indirectly places the onus on institutional structures regarding the constrained relationships between Black male teachers and boys. He insists that the limited number of Black male teachers in K-12 classrooms send negative messages about and teach them how to treat Black men in general.

It is important to draw from the extant literature to provide theoretical insights into the phenomenon between Vance and Mr. Tal. Although lacking, in most cases, from the educational literature, it is clear that some Black male and female teachers, who used culturally relevant pedagogy, had struggles connecting with some Black students during segregation (Foster, 1997). However, this idea has seldom been discussed in contemporary Black educational scholarship. Instead, Black teachers were perceived to have no constrained relationships with Black children (Foster, 1997). My study explores a culturally relevant teacher who was not able to connect with a Black male student. Therefore, more studies are needed to explore this phenomenon in K-12 classrooms.

Such research will be helpful demonstrating that culturally relevant teaching, while effective in many cases, is not a panacea. From a Black masculinity perspective, Black men teachers are not a monolithic group (Brockenbrough, 2012a, b; Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010). In other words, Black men teachers, culturally relevant or not, bring a plethora of social identities to K-12 classroom, which may hinder or help their relationships with Black boys (Brockenbrough, 2011, 2012a, b). Brockenbrough (2012a) explains that such idea is particularly the case for Black men teachers who may self-identify as gay. Because of the stereotypical ways gay men, especially gay Black men are portrayed in media and popular press (McCready & Mosley, 2014), cisgender, heterosexual, Black boys may find it difficult to connect with gay Black men teachers (Brockenbrough, 2012). In fact, even while Black men teachers do not self-identify as 'gay,' some Black male students still perceive them to be so (Howard, 2011). Because many men in early childhood education are perceived to be gay (Lynn, 2006a; Sargent, 2006), this idea is not to suggest that Mr. Tal is and/or self-identifies as gay. However, there is a limited number of educational research studies that document ethnographic accounts of culturally relevant Black men teachers who self-identify as gay (Brockenbrough, 2012a, b). However, drawing from Ladson-Billings' conception of culturally relevant pedagogy, Brockenbrough (2014) theorizes a 'queerly responsive' pedagogy, in response to the academic, and social needs of Black queer youth. This pedagogical conception entails addressing issues (i.e., HIV/AIDS) facing urban youth in public K-12 schools (Brockenbrough, 2014).

In light of the limited number of documented accounts of culturally relevant teachers who struggle to build positive relationships with Black and other students of

color. Many scholars may argue that Mr. Tal is not a culturally relevant teacher because of his inability to connect with Vance. However, what is culturally relevant about Mr. Tal is the approach he uses to attempt to engage and re-engage Vance. His approach also demonstrates his fictive kin ties to both Vance and Mrs. Peay (Cook, 2010). Furthermore, understanding Vance's positive relationship with Mrs. Peay, Mr. Tal collaborated with her, as she provided the care Vance needed at that time. Therefore, he understood the importance of collaboration to support Vance. In some cases, teachers are most likely to collaborate with school administration to have Black boys who interrupt like Vance removed from the classroom (Elias, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2011). However, Mr. Tal was very patient as he redirected Vance to re-engage in classroom activities, with the assistance of Mrs. Peay. It is also noteworthy that he allowed him to wander around the classroom without reprimanding him. During the focus group discussion, Mrs. Aretha also spoke to Mr. Tal's patience. She acknowledged that because of his temper, Maurice needs someone to be patient with him during challenging moments. During the focus group discussion, Maurice also acknowledges Mr. Tal's patience. When asked his perceptions of Mr. Tal, he suggested, "Mr. Tal always gives children one more chance."

In light of the growing disproportionality in school discipline between Black boys and their White male counterparts in early childhood education (U.S. Department of Education, 2014), most Black male students, who interrupt classrooms, are stereotypically seen as disruptive to the learning environment; thus, they are either suspended or expelled from early childhood education programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2014; Washington, 2015). Many scholars (Dancy, 2014; Howard, 2014; Kunjufu, 2013; Schott Foundation, 2014) contend that disproportionality in school

discipline starts the school-to-prison pipeline for Black male students. That is, Black males' subjective disciplinary removals from classrooms grow into greater disciplinary issues, which eventually lead to early entrance into the juvenile justice system in which they become trapped (Schott Foundation, 2014). Ladson-Billings (2011) argues that young White males, who commit similar behavioral infractions in classrooms, are seen as innocent; whereas Black male children are seen as men and forced to suffer men-like consequences in schools. White teachers also perceive White children to be more innocent than Black children (Milner, 2010b; Wright, 2015). During the focus group discussion, Mr. Raton suggested that he appreciated Mr. Tal because he understood "[Black] culture." He further suggested that because he understood the culture he would not easily "write him (referring to Braden) up" or send him out of the classroom for minor behavioral infractions. Reflecting on his personal schooling experience, he noticed that White teachers did not understand "the culture" and would often struggle to support he and his classmates in schools. Moreover, White and Black teachers perceive Black children's behavior differently in K-12 classroom (Delpit, 1995). That is, whereas Black teachers do not perceive Black children's interactional styles as behavioral issues in K-12 classrooms; White teachers do (Kunjufu, 2012). Therefore, in order to better support Black males in K-12 schools, teacher education programs should prepare White teachers to engage in culturally relevant classroom management practices (Milner & Tenore, 2010). There is a growing body of academic literature that focuses on preparing White teachers to become more empathetic towards Black boys in K-12 classrooms, which can help White teachers build better relationships with them (Warren, 2014; 2015).

According to Bryan et al. (2016) and Milner and Tenore (2010), culturally relevant teachers know how to use collaborative efforts and support systems in the forms of family members and other stakeholders to support Black and other children within urban classrooms to avoid the use and the excessive use of disciplinary methods including suspension and expulsion. During the focus group discussion, Mrs. Aretha acknowledged that Mr. Tal called her if Maurice were having issues in the classrooms, which made her more comfortable with Mr. Tal. She further stated that such interaction with Mr. Tal would enable her to resolve the issue at home with Maurice. In a study conducted by my colleagues and I (Bryan, et al., 2016), we explored the culturally relevant school leadership practices of Mrs. Cecelia Rogers. We found that in response to the disproportional numbers of suspensions and expulsion between Black and White children in Charleston County School District, Mrs. Rogers was determined not to use suspension and expulsions as disciplinary methods (Bryan et al., 2016). Instead, she engaged family members and other school support personnel to re-engage Black students in the educational process. In fact, a component of the school's vision and mission statement included the school's commitment to dismantling school disciplinary practices including suspensions and expulsion that negatively impacted the academic success of Black students, particularly Black boys in early childhood education and in other grade levels (Bryan et al., 2016). Although there is a slow, yet, growing movement to re-conceptualize school disciplinary practices (US Department of Education, 2014), the movement has not reached public K-12 schools for the most part, as most school administrators and teachers continue to uphold hegemonic school disciplinary practices.

Although Vance interrupted the class during the classroom observations, he made the highest academic gains in reading as indicated on the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), which is a nationally known assessment used by most school districts to measure students' academic growth in reading, math, and other content areas. MAP scores can be found in Appendix E. Therefore, academically, Mr. Tal was reaching him in some ways. When asked about Vance's progress, Mr. Tal perceives him to be a naturally gifted child. However, it would have been good to probe further regarding specific academic strategies he used to reach Vance. Considering that Mr. Tal referred to Vance as 'gifted', insights from the literature could shed light on Vance's situation. Ford (2013) contends that 'gifted' children often interrupt classrooms and engage in other non-instructional activities, when academic content may not be rigorous enough to help them to reach their full academic potential. This idea is not to suggest that Mr. Tal's instructional practices were not rigorous because they were highly rigorous. Some children may need more rigor than others (Ford, 2011).

Although academic success is not limited to what Black students are able to do on local, national and state-level assessments, Ladson-Billings (2009) acknowledges the importance of Black students being able to meet academic goals as outlined by local, national, and state-level mandates. She suggests that academic success entails long-term and positive educational outcomes. In other words, what students are able to do academically should position them for long-term success beyond schools and classroom (Aronson & Laughter, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009). They should be able to become participants in the democratic process of society (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Consider the following dialogic exchange between Mrs. Kathey, Mrs. April, and Mrs. Aretha, which



suggests that Mr. Tal engages his Black male students in long-term academic success beyond the classroom:

**Mrs. April:** I can tell by how he does his work. Like the others, Cameron is very energetic and he gets easily side-tracked but he seems to be a little bit more focused now. He tells me all the time that ‘Momma, don’t you know that Mr. Tal says?...’ I’m like...Ok, whatever Mr. Tal says. I can tell the difference in how he focuses now. His love of just being interested in learning... I mean it’s at the most random times. Like when we are riding in the car, he wants a pen and a piece of paper in the back seat. He always wants to write now. He always asks now, ‘Mommie how do you spell this, how do you write this?’ ‘And you know...we did this in school and we did that...and we did this center today and Mr. Tal said this and Mr. Tal said that...’ When you have a child who speaks about his teacher, you know like more than just during school, you can tell the impact that he has.

**Mrs. Kathey:** He will come home and he’ll say when he’s learned something. He’ll say ‘Nana, what’s 13 plus 13?’ I know that he’s definitely learning all these different things. I’m not good at talking.

**Bryan:** No. You’re good. You’re perfectly fine.

**Mrs. Aretha:** That’s the same thing with Maurice. It’s like he will start off in one area and he will go up to what they’ve learned. Then he’ll take it beyond. He’ll ask, ‘Like what is that or that...what is seventy plus seventy?’ He doubles it. He keeps going so I understand. It’s like you don’t often get children who look forward to coming to school...and they have that...to me it’s priceless because I

raised three others and they were smart but it was like pulling teeth...it's time to get up to go to school...you know? And with him it doesn't take much. Maurice, it's time to get up for school...he's up! You know he is ready to go. And you know you just don't get that.

While speaking about how Mr. Tal influences long-term success beyond the kindergarten classroom, these Black parents also acknowledge the motivation Mr. Tal provides their Black sons to learn and come to school. Ladson-Billings (2009) contends that culturally relevant teachers motivate Black students to become life-long learners beyond the walls of the school. In other words, they develop in students a passion for learning (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Because passion and the ability to motivate Black boys to learn are missing components of most K-12 classrooms, some Black boys do not like going to school (Kunjufu, 2007).

On another note, out of all of the participants in this study, Mr. Tal is the youngest and has the least amount of years of experience in the kindergarten classroom. Therefore, he is still developing his skills as a classroom teacher. This is an ongoing process for all teachers, especially culturally relevant ones (Ladson-Billings, 1994). At the same time, he is trying to deepen his understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy as he infuses these ideals in his classroom. According to Mr. Tal during an informal conversation in his classroom, he is best friend with a former Black male kindergartner teacher (Mr. D.) who is now a college professor in the state. Mr. D. is currently a doctoral student who used culturally relevant practices in his kindergarten classroom. Therefore, Mr. Tal receives a lot of information about culturally relevant teaching from Mr. D. In fact, during another conversation, Mr. Tal remarked that Mr. D had sent him some e-mails

relative to culturally relevant reading and writing lessons and other activities he could infuse into his classroom. Based on his limited experience in the classroom and his emerging desire to infuse culturally relevant practices into his kindergarten curriculum, I consider Mr. Tal to be an ‘emerging culturally relevant pedagogue’ because he is still grappling with and learning to infuse culturally relevant practices into his classroom. During several observations in his classroom, I have seen him contemplate activities to ensure they were culturally relevant enough to use with his students. During a classroom observation, he assigned some students to do a computerized reading program, which he was required to use by his school district. According to Mr. Tal, the principal monitored teachers’ use of the program. He asked me, “I don’t know if this is culturally appropriate for our students. What do you think?” Based on what I observed the program, like most reading programs, was not culturally responsive. This idea could also explain his response to Vance’s classroom interruptions.

Teachers may be at different degrees of culturally relevant identity and pedagogical development (Milner, 2010b). Such is the case for Mr. Tal. However, scholarship on culturally relevant pedagogy rarely acknowledges these degrees of development. There are few examples of teachers who are emerging culturally relevant pedagogy and/or developing into culturally relevant pedagogues (Milner, 2010b). Moreover, scholarship is scant regarding strategies more accomplished culturally relevant pedagogues can use to support emerging and/or developing culturally relevant pedagogues in their development are unclear in the literature. Considering that scholars have explored stages of racial identity and cycles of socialization (Cross, 1991; Harro, 2000; Helms, 2008), scholars who explore culturally relevant teachers should explore

what I consider cycles/ dimensions of culturally relevant identity and pedagogical development.

To continue to center Mr. Tal's remark regarding the virtual non-existence of Black men teachers, the literature is clear regarding institutional barriers including teacher assessment examinations designed to keep Black males and other teachers of color out of the teaching profession. In fact, Mr. Tal speaks of his challenges passing the PRAXIS 1 and 2 exam which is required for teacher certification. During an interview in his classroom, with much emotion and tears in his eyes, he suggested it took him five attempts at the exam before he was able to successfully pass them. However, he finally passed the exams and now is a public K-5 certified teacher, a goal he had in mind since he was a young child who played school with his sister. In other words, national teacher licensure exams can deter Black men's dreams of becoming teachers (Bryan & Browder, 2013). Scholars (Bianco, Leech, & Mitchell, 2011; Bryan & Browder, 2013) have documented the challenges aspiring Black males and other teachers of color face with teacher licensure exams including teacher certification examinations. They argue that these exams are no indication of Black pre-service teachers' cognitive abilities, but they are culturally biased, thus granting advantages to White pre-service teachers (Bianco, Leech, & Mitchell, 2011). From a Critical Race Theoretical perspective, teacher certification examination including PRAXIS is a prime example of systemic and permanent racism that exists in American society that negatively impact the upward and social mobility of Black and Brown people (Bianco et al., 2011). Moreover, drawing from Black education historical research (Siddle-Walker, 2001), teaching licensure exams have always been a strategic, racist attempt used to keep Black teachers out of

public school classrooms. This issue provides one clear explanation regarding the scarcity of Black male (and female) teachers who are currently in public K-12 education (Aud et al., 2013; Sleeter & Milner, 2011). This idea could also possibly explain why Mr. Tal was 1 of 2 Black male teachers in his school. During the observations, I was introduced to a Black male who was the school's art teacher.

Considering that these kinds of institutional barriers in the form of teacher assessments negatively impact aspiring Black male teachers, scholars rarely explore in educational literature how they negatively impact Black male students' perceptions of Black men in general and how Black boys treat them when Black men do become teachers. Bryan and Browder (2013) and Jackson, Boutte, and Wilson (2013) contend that the presence of Black male teachers should not be as problematic as concerns regarding their absence. In other words, the focus should not be on what happens, when Black male teachers, particularly at the early childhood level, are present in schools to support Black males, but what happens when they are not there. When talking about the support Mr. Tal provides her grandson Maurice during the focus group conversation, Mrs. Aretha suggested that she did not know how Maurice's school year would turn out, if Mr. Tal were not his teacher.

Moreover, Bryan and Browder (2013) and Warren (2013) note that institutional barriers are also inclusive of race and racism that aspiring Black men teachers confront in pre-service teacher education program, particularly at Predominantly White Institutions. These scholars note that faculty and pre-service teachers who are predominantly White and female are often responsible for enacting racial microaggressions that may impact how Black male pre-service teachers matriculate through teacher education programs.

During one of the interviews, Mr. Tal shared that when he took a course entitled Sociology of Education, in which the White professors discussed issues regarding Black people including the enslavement of African people, the professor and his White classmates often deferred to him for information as if he were the ‘spokesperson’ for Black people. Mr. Tal was the only Black male student in the course and in his pre-service teacher education program at a predominantly White college, College of Chucktown. While there is a growing and insurmountable amount of research studies examining racial microaggressions in higher education and pre-service teacher education program (Palmer & Maramba, 2015; Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011; Sue & Constantine, 2007), more studies on Black male teachers and their experiences within predominantly white pre-service teacher education programs are needed to support aspiring Black men who desire to teach. Bryan and Browder (2013) also contend that aspiring Black men teachers who major in early childhood education may also be victims of gender microaggressions and the inscription of masculinity, which places the sexuality in question. During an informal conversation in his school’s hallway, Mr. Tal suggested that people always questioned his desire to work with young children because he is a Black man. Thus, more studies are also needed to explore Black men in early childhood education and the politics of the ‘ascription of masculinity.’

### **Self-identifying as a Fictive Father Who Draws From the Black Educational Community to Empower His Students and Community**

There is a limited amount of educational research on the *Call Me Mister* Program, a Black male teacher recruitment initiative, particularly regarding how MISTER (Mentors Instructing Students Towards Effective Role Modeling) participants

academically and socially influence Black male children in K-12 (Jones & Jenkins, 2012). However, when asked about his perception regarding Black male teachers during an interview in his classroom, Mr. Tal draws from his *Call Me Mister* experiences and suggests that *Call Me Mister* provided him skills to better support his Black male students and communities in which they live.

I would first have to use the MISTER acronym, which was a program (*referring to the Call Me Mister Program*) I was a part of during my matriculation at the College of Chucktownville (pseudonym). So ‘Mentors Instructing Students Towards Effective Role Modeling.’ It’s how I would encapsulate some of what is expected of me as a teacher. It’s a job that you have to have so many different ...so many different...how should I say...attitudes and disposition you have to take on. So, I think within the MISTER program that kinda really cultivated my teaching style. Call Me Mister was actually integral in my development because it provided me an actual authentic model for what it meant to be a mentor and an ambassador. It really laid the foundation for me being a role model for my students especially my Black males. A lot of the Misters were vocal in providing a model for what it meant to be a role model for a child.

Mr. Tal suggests that he gained a lot of skills that encouraged him to develop attitudes and dispositions to support his students, particularly his Black male students in K-12 classrooms. During my observations, this came alive in every aspect of his pedagogical practices, except two minor classroom interruption incidents relating to Vance.

Later in the interview, he notes that *Call Me Mister* assisted him in developing attitudes and disposition that were not only empowering to him, but also empowering to

the students and communities in which they live. In other words, he perceives he gained skills to see teaching and learning as connected to the long-term prosperity of the community. Mrs. Kathey, during the focus group discussion, noted that Mr. Tal had a long-term commitment to the community because he was not only from the community, but she also saw him at all the school and community events. Ladson-Billings (2009) asserts that the underlining purpose of culturally relevant teaching is to empower Black children to learn and to situate teaching and learning as a community practice, which have long-term influence on both students and communities. DuBois (1903) also spoke to the empowering nature of teaching and learning that was essential to the Black community, as they challenge systems of White Supremacy and racism.

However, most Black and White pre-service and in-service teachers are neither prepared in teacher education programs to empower Black children to learn nor see their roles as teachers as being a part of their communities of the children they serve (Boutte, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2005a, b). During one of the interviews, Mr. Tal noted that most of his White teacher colleagues often leave school during student dismissal, which he felt demonstrated their lack of concern for the children with whom they work. In a later phone conversation, Mr. Tal jokingly admitted that he was going to leave school “white girl style” or early because of plans he had one weekend. This conception of teacher preparation and practice is antithetical to historical Black educational research studies (Anderson, 1988; Dingus, 2006; Morris & Munroe, 2009; Perry et al., 2003; Siddle-Walker, 1996, 2001; Siddle-Walker & Archung, 2003) which acknowledge that Black teachers have always been seen as a part of and connected to Black communities in empowering ways. In fact, they lived in Black communities and attended similar



community functions including church with their Black students and parents (Siddle-Walker, 1996, 2001). During an informal conversation in his classroom, Mr. Tal admitted that he attends church with some of his students. Mrs. April also acknowledged during the focus group discussion that she had a relationship with Mr. Tal beyond the school setting. She was friends with Mr. Tal's twin sister.

Unfortunately, such limited efforts to empower Black children to learn and most teachers' inabilities to see themselves as a part of Black communities continue in in-service teaching programs, as most teachers are neither aware of culturally relevant pedagogies nor prepared to acknowledge the cultural wealth within Black communities (Boutte, 2015; Ladson-Billings 2001, 2005a, b). Instead, they are prepared to become defenders of the status quo and to separate themselves from Black children and communities (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Thus, there is not a need, at this juncture to pursue a culturally sustaining pedagogy, because teachers have not mastered culturally relevant ones (Boutte, 2015).

Drawing from a Critical Race theoretical perspective, to have a Black male teacher recruitment program, like *Call Me Mister*, that supports Black teachers to empower Black children and communities, and help Black male teachers to see themselves as a part of Black communities as suggested by Mr. Tal is a counternarrative in and of itself. Because Black male teachers, like Black people in general, are victims of White Supremacy and racism (Bell, 1998; DuBois, 1903; West, 1999; Woodson, 1933), they often do not see how they perpetuate White Supremacy as they ignore the vestiges of them in societal institutions, particularly in pre-service teacher education programs where, in most cases, they are neither wanted nor welcomed (Bryan & Browder, 2013;

Warren, 2012). Additional research studies which explore *Call Me Mister* and other Black male teacher recruitment initiatives to further determine their potential to prepare aspiring Black male teachers to empower Black children and communities would shed insight on the pressing educational issue of teacher preparation approaches which work.

Mr. Tal suggests that his former Black female social studies teacher, Mrs. Hairfield, inspired him to teach and support his Black male students in empowering ways because of the ways she taught when he was a student. He contends,

I think if I had to describe an experience, it would have to be a Black teacher in middle school. Her name was...she taught me social studies...her name was Mrs. Hairfield. It was how she presented the material. I was receptive to it. I enjoyed learning but I think even before I had her as a teacher I knew teaching was what I wanted to do.

While there is research studies that suggest that Black men are often encouraged by family members to become teachers (Brown & Butty, 1999; Bryan & Browder, 2013), my study highlights the role Black female teachers play in encouraging Black men to become teachers. Although his middle school teacher inspired him to teach, Mr. Tal is now an early childhood teacher. Because there are few Black female teachers (Lewis & Toldson, 2013), especially at the early childhood level, Black men teacher may rarely have opportunities to be encouraged to become teachers.

Mrs. Hairfield not only inspired Mr. Tal to become a teacher, but she also has had profound impact on his teaching and the way he teaches his Black male kindergartners.

Yes... it [referring to lessons] was always cohesive and I connected to it. Mrs.

Hairfield taught Social Studies in a way... Math and reading were my very strong

areas but the way she taught Social Studies, it was very relevant. I learned a lot of Black history facts. It was ... It was something that I felt like I always wanted to know more about what she doing. It was something that applied to a real world situation. So I want my students to experience the same so they can say I impacted their lives in the same way.

Based on his comments, Mr. Tal perceives Mrs. Hairfield's teaching as culturally relevant to him, which made him interested in learning more. He desires similar experiences for his students. Historically, Black teachers who were seen as culturally relevant and fictive kin have always left an indelible impression on Black students (Cook, 2012; Foster, 1997). Often, they encouraged them to pursue careers in teaching and other professional fields (Siddle-Walker, 2001). While there is a plethora of research on culturally relevant teachers and Black teachers who are fictive kin and their influence on the students they teach, my study builds on these studies by exploring the influence of culturally relevant teachers and fictive kin on the identities and pedagogical practices of other teachers, particularly on Black men teachers. Similarly, my study builds on ways Black male teachers draw from the pedagogical wisdom of former Black female teachers to support their pedagogies in classrooms, especially early childhood ones. While Mr. Tal draws wisdom and pedagogical expertise from his former Black female teachers, he also affirms, motivates, has high expectation for, and builds resilience among his Black male kindergarteners.

### **Affirming, Motivating, Having High Expectations For and Building Resilience**

During an interview in his classroom, I asked Mr. Tal about what, if anything, led to the kinds of success he had with his Black male students. He further spoke of

particular challenges associated with passing the PRAXIS examination, which leads to professional teaching certification.

My own life... I feel like I failed my way to success... I know a story wasn't asked...even seeking certification, I had to take the certification test five times I felt like that wasn't appropriate for me. I felt like I was on ... I was already certified in one area and went back to become certified in another. I was determined not to let this one test defeat me so I think my success with my Black boys is from my failures. I learn more from failures.

Brown (2011) posits that culturally relevant Black male teachers use “pedagogies of experiences” to support Black males in K-12 classrooms. That is, they draw from their personal lived experiences confronting issues of race and racism and other institutional inequities to inform their pedagogies and practices in classrooms (Brown, 2011). Such is the case for Mr. Tal. He uses his personal failures with the PRAXIS exam to insist on success in his classroom for his Black male students. However, while Brown's (2011) work provide some theoretical insights into how Black male middle schools teachers employ pedagogies of experiences to support Black males in middle schools, it is still unclear in the literature regarding ways Black male teachers in early childhood draw from their pedagogies of experiences to support young Black male kindergartners. My study addresses Black male kindergarten teachers who draw from their pedagogies of experiences to support young males.

When asked about how his personal failures, which leads him to cultivate success among his Black male students, translates into classroom practices, he expatiates,

I allow my children to feel successful...wow...how do I? My Black boys don't feel like failures. I encourage them... push them. They feel like each moment is a moment of success. I think... I have an appreciation for success so much I feel like I can't articulate how I do it with them. It is just something I do innately. I think it is just protecting them and trying to cultivate it within them a resilient mind and spirit. I think it is protecting them and securing ...making them feel secure in the confines of my room. That they don't feel inadequate.

Drawing from his personal failures, Mr. Tal cultivates a classroom where his Black male students feel successful and safe. In so doing, he encourages them and teaches them to be resilient in the face of oppositions. Cook (2010) contends that Black teachers who are fictive kin teach not only the academic curriculum, but they teach what I call the 'curriculum of Black resilience' or skills, and strategies to teach Black children to survive when faced with racialized and other forms of opposition in schools and society writ large. Historically, Black teachers have always taught Black children to be resilient in the face of racial opposition that was designed to ensure their inferiority in society writ large (Dingus, 2006; Perry et al., 2003; Siddle-Walker, 1996, 2001). While scholars have theorized the role Black teachers who build resilience among Black children in schools have played in their lives (Cook, 2010; Fordham, 1996), my research study focuses on ways Black teachers, particularly Black male kindergarten teachers, play in building resilient among young Black boys in early childhood classroom. Particularly important in this study is the focus on building resilience among Black boys. This study can help educators better understand ways to support Black male kindergartners and other minoritized boys in early childhood classrooms. Considering that there is a growing body

of research studies focusing on ways White teachers need to and are enacting empathy towards Black boys (Warren, 2015), there is a need for more research studies that encourage teacher to build resilience among them in early childhood classrooms.

### **Understanding Racialized Challenges Black Males Face in Schools and Using That Understanding to Re-shape Curricular and Other Experiences in His Classroom**

When asked about what he liked about teaching kindergarten during our formal interview, Mr. Tal spoke about recognizing gaps in the early education of young Black males and being able to address those gaps in his teaching. He commented that even in his schooling experiences, many of the practices he was forced to endure were not effective including the “one-size fits all” curriculum. He further acknowledged that finding books and other school resources that positively represent Black families is virtually non-existent in early childhood. He explained how he responded to ineffective practices and lack of resources that positively reflect the lived experiences of Black people. He relates,

The way African American children learn...they're very oral especially my boys. Their oral language, which is still not appreciated. Their storytelling...their inquisitiveness, their eagerness, their curiosity, all of things are not represented in early childhood education... that is the foundation of the education of a lot of children. I embrace these things in my classroom. For example, children could be asked to find the setting of a story...and the setting could be a plethora of things that they know from their personal experience. However, they make it to be one thing and if it's not that one way, then it's not right. Particularly with African American children, they may have more ways to say it instead of what the

suggested answer might say [be]. So I feel like that they are not appreciated. So I let them see it their way and from their perspective.

During one of the observations, I noticed that students were provided opportunities to draw pictures of and write about their family members. A Black male kindergartener in Mr. Tal's class, Maurice, was proud to show me a picture he drew of his grandmother. Under the picture, he wrote these words, "I lve my granny." I asked him what he wrote. He said, "I love my granny." On another occasion, Mr. Tal encouraged his students to describe their family book in front of the classroom. Several boys and girls participated in this activity that gave them opportunities to share in their own way.

In response to the school curriculum and practices that often marginalize Black children, Mr. Tal engages in counter curricular practices that enable his Black male and other students to center their voices, storytelling, and lived experiences in the curriculum. Even as early as early childhood education, Black and Brown children are inundated with a White-centered curriculum that overemphasized Whiteness (Bryan et al., 2016; Souto-Manning, 2014). This provides a clear rationale regarding why in the Clark and Clark's (1947) study of Black boy and girl participants internalized racism that led them to uphold White beauty and devalue Black beauty. Black children (and other children of color) need to come to understand who they are from a strength perspective through school curricula and other schooling practices (Boutte, 2015; Grant et al., 2016; King, 2005).

From a culturally relevant and Critical Race Theoretical perspective, teachers who center the voices and experiences of Black and other children of color aid in developing critical consciousness and providing counter-narratives regarding who counts in the

world and schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1999). Developing such critical consciousness is important to their academic achievement and cultural competence (Ladson-Billings, 2009). However, culturally relevant and Critical Race pedagogies remain on the periphery of early childhood education. This idea explains why Mr. Tal has to seek out children's literature and other school resources that value the cultural experiences of his students. Thus, studies, like the present one, are needed on culturally relevant teachers, particularly Black male teachers in early childhood education and how they redesign curricular experiences and school practices to support their Black males and other students of color.

What is also interesting in this case is Mr. Tal's ability to reflect on ways he was personally racialized and disenfranchised in schools. In other words, Mr. Tal easily connected his experiences in schools to the experiences of his Black males and other students. Such is not the case for all teachers. Because the field is predominantly White and female (Aud et al., 2013), White teachers typically do not acknowledge their personal schooling experiences as racialized in similar ways as Black and Brown teachers (Boutte, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Thus, there is a growing body of educational research studies, books, and policy briefs that overemphasize the importance of White middle-class teachers acknowledging the racial and class privilege they bring to K-12 classroom spaces (Boutte, 2015; Delpit, 2012; Howard, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010b, 2015). White teachers must engage in the transformation of self, which leads to the transformation of teaching for Black and Brown children in K-12 schools (Souto-Manning, 2010). While coming to these understandings for White teachers is an important phenomenon, in most cases, such overwhelming emphasis on White teachers



has contributed to the under-whelming attention given to the needs of Black and Brown teachers who aspire to become and are K-12 teachers (Sleeter & Milner, 2011). In other words, as Black scholars, in most cases, we rarely focus on our own experiences at the expense of preparing White teachers to teach Black and Brown children (Sleeter & Milner, 2011). Black teachers are victims of White Supremacy and racism and they, too, need to understand how these social constructions negatively impact their pedagogical practices in K-12 classrooms. Milner (2010)'s work *Start Where You Are, But Don't Stay: Understanding Diversity, Opportunity Gaps and Teaching in Today's Classroom*, documents the journey of White and Black teachers on their journey to becoming or engaging as culturally relevant pedagogues in urban schools. Although Milner has added great insight on culturally relevant pedagogues in urban schools and has helped to dispel the myth that Black and other teachers have easier times teaching children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds based on their phenotype, he rarely provides an ethnographic account of a teacher from a diverse background who struggles to teach, relate to, and engage students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Bryan, 2012). In most cases, all of the Black teachers were successful teaching students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in Milner's study (Bryan, 2012). These ideas seem to suggest that teachers of diverse backgrounds do have easier times teaching students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and that they all understand the necessity to work against White-centered curricular and school practices (Bryan, 2012). It is clear that not all teachers of diverse backgrounds have come to such understandings as it relates to their pedagogical practices (Matias, 2013). Ladson-Billings (2009) contends that some teachers are assimilationists. That is, they maintain the status

quo in their pedagogical practices (Ladson-Billings, 2009). I explore Mr. Tal as a teacher who engages in family-centered practices.

### **Engaging in Family-centered Practices Inside and Outside of His Classroom**

Boutte and Johnson (2013) and Reynolds (2010) contend that Black family members are not often made to feel a part of the educational process, because schools often do not acknowledge and value ways they participate in it. However, during the focus group discussion, several of the parent participants noted that Mr. Tal made them feel a part of the educational process of their sons. Mrs. Aretha suggested during the focus group that Mr. Tal calls her and she has opportunities to speak to Mr. Tal at school during times, which are convenient for her. According to Boutte and Johnson (2013), Black family involvement may look slightly different than ways White family members involve themselves in schools.

Mr. Tal views Black family members as integral parts of the educational process of his young Black male kindergarteners. During one of the interviews, Mr. Tal explains that at the beginning of and throughout the school year he elicits the voices of Black family members to plan lessons and to determine how his students learn through parent surveys. During a more informal observation in the school's hallway, which took place after the focus group discussion, Mrs. April sought out Mr. Tal to engage in a conversation about Cameron's progress in his class. Mrs. April was excited about sharing a reading strategy she has been using at home to help Cameron read more and improve his reading levels. Mr. Tal thought it was a brilliant idea and agreed to use the strategy in the classroom.

These considerations are important because the wisdom, knowledge, and voices of Black family members are rarely included to inform pedagogical practices in K-12 classrooms. Most White (and Black) teachers perceive themselves to be working for instead of working with Black children and families to meet the academic and social needs of Black children (Boutte, 2015; Matias, 2013). In fact, schools are structured in a way to support teachers as the only individuals who know what is best academically and socially for Black and other children (Boutte & Johnson, 2013). According to Ladson-Billings (2009), culturally relevant teachers understand that teaching and learning is inclusive of community stakeholders including Black family members who work collaboratively with teachers to meet the needs of their Black children. In other words, Black family members are co-constructors of knowledge to support children. I now explore the identities and pedagogical styles of Mr. Tal as perceived by his Black male kindergartners.

### **Black Male Kindergarteners On Mr. Tal**

While the voices of Black male teachers are important additions to the educational research literature, studies also need to include the voices of children, particularly young children of color whose voices are always on the periphery of early childhood education. This is particularly true for young children of color. This study elicits the voices of Mr. Tal's Black male students regarding their perceptions of his identities and pedagogical styles in the kindergarten classroom. They perceive that Mr. Tal is a teacher who uses culturally relevant and Black masculine literacy practices in their kindergarten classroom. Moreover, he plays and relates to them inside and outside of the classroom.

## **Using Culturally Relevant and Black Masculine Literacy Practices**

For example, Braden describes Mr. Tal as one who uses literacy practices that remind him of being in church. He relates when asked about what he thought of Mr. Tal, “When we be reading, he be singing like we be in church sometimes.” Therefore in this case, Braden sees Mr. Tal as drawing from the wealth of the Black church to teach him reading. During all of my classroom visits, Mr. Tal also engages in “call and response,” which is another component of the Black church. He calls out as he prepares the students to transition from one activity to another, “All eyes on me.” The students respond, “All eyes on you.” This is an important idea because many teachers do not value Black churches or any other Black religious institutions and do not use them to inform teaching and learning in K-12 schools (Haight, 2002). Such disregard occurs despite the idea that most Black children, including boys, perform well in churches (and other religious institutions) and not school (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Haight, 2002). Therefore, while some scholars have explored the importance of connecting the Black church experience to teaching and learning in K-12 schools, my study explores how teachers can use the Black church and other Black religious institutional experiences to inform teaching and learning. Moreover, my study addresses Black male teachers who draw from the Black church experience to inform teaching and learning in their pedagogical practices. Because Braden suggested that Mr. Tal was singing like he was in church during reading, his suggestions highlights gospel music, and also demonstrates the important of integrating Black religious music into pedagogical practices. However, although several scholars have explored the use of hip-hop and other music forms to inform teaching and learning (Hill, 2009, Love, 2013) few scholars have explored the use and application of gospel

and other Black religious music to inform teaching and learning. Although there are policies regarding the separation between church and state (Center for Public Education, 2015), such policies still allow student-initiated religious practices and events. Thus, considering that some Black children attend church and other religious institutions, they can be encouraged to engage in student-initiated activities that amplify gospel and other Black religious music.

While culturally relevant practices were evident in his classrooms, Mr. Tal also demonstrates his ability to embrace Black masculine literacies or literacies, which embrace Black male identities. During our focus group discussion, Braden acknowledges that Mr. Tal gave him 15 racecar books to read in class and books he could take home. In his classroom, during an informal conversation, Mr. Tal has also acknowledged that he has given student books to take home. As Braden explained, he demonstrated excitement about being able to take books home. Although Kirkland (2011) enacted Black masculine literacy practices with middle schools Black males, my study demonstrates how Black male teachers enact Black masculine pedagogies with Black males in early childhood education.

Some of the Black male kindergartners in this study were highly motivated by sports inside and outside of the classroom. During the focus group discussion, Montrel starts off the conversation about how Mr. Tal and he admired the same football team (The Seahawks). Then, he later expresses how he adores playing basketball during recess. Later, Maurice also acknowledges that Mr. Tal runs with him at recess. During a classroom observation, Mr. Tal allowed a group of Black male students an opportunity to select sport books from the bookshelf. Therefore, having the opportunities to connect

their passions for sports to literacy made them see literacy as a meaningful content area. In other words, sports became a culturally relevant way to motivate young Black male kindergarteners to read. Scholars (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009; Morrell, 2002; Tatum, 2009) have underscored the importance of making literacy a meaningful, culturally relevant practice for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The emphasis of the use of culturally relevant literacy practices comes in response to research studies suggesting that students of color, especially Black boys, are often not reading on grade level and score at the bottom of the totem pole on every national assessment in literacy (Tatum, 2009). My study focuses on ways Black male kindergarten teachers use and Black male students engage with culturally relevant literacy practices in early childhood classrooms. In the next section of this study, I explore the perceptions of Black family members on Mr. Tal's identities and pedagogical styles.

### **Black Family Members On Mr. Tal**

Considering that the perceptions of Black male kindergarteners were important to this study, the perceptions of Black family members were also important. Black family members perceive Mr. Tal to be a Role Model who represents positive images of Black manhood for Black male kindergarteners. They also perceive him to be a Role Model who minimizes their distrust for and provide them relief from White teachers. Below I discuss these themes.

### **Mr. Tal Is a Role Model Who Represents Positive Images of Black Manhood as Assets**

Like the majority of the Black family members in this study, the Black family members whose Black male kindergartners are students in Mr. Tal's classroom perceive

him to be a Role Model. However, like Mrs. Boin and Mrs. Felice, these family members see him from a dynamic perspective as it relates to Black manhood. Mrs. April, who admits that she and her husband are separated, suggests that Mr. Tal provided “extra structure” for her son (Cameron) and he was “an extra male figure.” She also suggests that Mr. Tal provided the “extra push.” Despite her divorce she never perceives Mr. Tal as filling the gap for her husband. She perceives him as an additional Role Model in Cameroun’s life. Unfortunately, a part of the White Supremacist structure is to keep Black families divided (Burrell, 2010). In so doing, most Black women often receive messages which contribute to deficit outlooks and perspectives relative to Black men, yet enjoying what Black men provide them sexually (hooks, 2004). Mr. Raton, Braden’s father, perceives that Mr. Tal projects a positive image of Black manhood, which works against the typical stereotypical images of Black men as represented through media and popular press. He suggests that in light of such image, Black boys can see their own potential and strive to be like Mr. Tal. Mr. Raton’s comment is important to this study, because scholars rarely ask Black men their perceptions about other Black men particularly regarding Black men teachers. Therefore, although there are a few studies that elicit the voices of Black fathers in reference to Black men teachers (Bryan & Browder, 2013), my study elicit the voices and perceptions of Black fathers on Black men teachers, especially in early childhood education. In another study (Bryan & Browder, 2013), my colleagues and I interviewed a Black male kindergarten teacher discovering that a Black father questioned his ability to work in the capacity of a kindergarten teacher. The Black father asked him, “Are you sure you know what you’re doing? The “ascription of incompetence”(p. 146) in educational literature refers to Black

men's inability to perform effectively in K-12 classrooms. In the next section, I explore Black family members' perception regarding Mr. Tal as a Role Model who minimizes their distrust for White teachers.

### **Mr. Tal Is a Teacher Who Minimize Distrust for White Teachers and Provide Relief for Black Family Members**

A conversation arose with a few Black family members, which was similar to one I had with Mrs. Martha and Cherise, who were family members of Black male kindergartens in Mr. Javien's class. Mr. Raton and Mrs. Aretha expressed their concerns relative to White teachers and their interactional styles with Black male students.

**Mr. Raton:** I was pretty relieved actually. I really ... I did not come in with any preconceived notions about who he was going to get as a teacher. But the moment I met him (Mr. Tal) and Mrs. Monroe (teacher assistant), I was actually pretty relieved. More so in the sense that he understands the culture. Being able to relate to Ryan and other students in the class, they would not be as readily or quick to write him up if he has a problem. If he has a problem with Ryan, he would know how to address or he can come to me or I have given him the green light to handle Ryan the way he should. He is a bright kid but the energy is intensively spoken at times so whatever he needs to do to reel him back in he has my blessings. I really felt kinda relieved actually.

**Bryan:** Why do you say "relieved"?

**Mr. Raton:** Naturally, some people fear Black males so any little thing they do could be taken out of context. So to have someone who understands the culture ... at least I think helps with that.



**Bryan:** When you say “some people,” who are you talking about?

**Mr. Raton:** Well, you know...some White teachers...not all but some. I remember when I was in school some of them didn’t really know how to really deal with me or any of my classmates. So having Mr. Tal make me feel a little relieved.

While connecting it to his own schooling experience where White teachers “didn’t know how to deal [him] or any of [his] classmates’, Mr. Raton specifically acknowledges ‘some’ White teachers as the source of his distrust. He suggests that because Mr. Tal “understands the culture, and is relatable to his son,” he felt “relieved.” This means that White teachers who do not understand the culture would be readily or quick to write [his son] up if they perceived that there was a problem. Landsman and Lewis (2011) and Milner (2010b) suggest that there is a cultural mismatch between White teachers and students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, which often leads to most White teachers’ misunderstanding of cultural aspects relative to students of color. This leads to what he considers cultural conflicts in K-12 classrooms (Landsman & Lewis, 2011; Milner, 2010b). As a result, most White (and Black) teachers may often send Black boys out of the classroom for subjective disciplinary actions (Bryan & Ford, 2014; Dancy, 2014; Milner, 2010b). The consequence of such subjective disciplinary actions is often suspension and expulsion from schools (Losen, 2013). Mr. Raton understood such consequences as he worried about White teachers “[writing up] his son Braden. Black males are particularly most affected by school suspension and expulsion in comparison to males from other racial and ethnic group (Losen, 2013). Black male student are most likely to become a part of the school to prison pipeline that

leads to their mass incarceration amid many other adverse effects (Alexander, 2010; Losen, 2010). Thus, Mr. Raton has a plethora of reasons to be concerned about his son, particularly when teacher may misinterpret Black cultural norms as disciplinary infractions in kindergarten classroom that could possibly create life-altering results in schools and society writ large.

Mrs. Aretha furthers Mr. Raton's comments in regards to his distrust of White teachers as she agrees with him. Consider the following dialogic exchange.

**Mrs. Aretha:** Yea, that was same with me (agreeing with Mr. Raton). It was like... I wasn't sure who he was going to get but then seeing the interaction between him and the students and just him in general (Mr. Tal), he just took such a positive stance on what he wants to do as a teacher as a whole, and what he wanted to provide them with. When he spoke of his outlook for the class for the year...most teachers you don't get that and he was upfront and he already knew what he wanted for his students. That was positive for me because a lot of times you go to meetings right before school and you go to meet and greet and you just get normally just the general guidelines about what the teacher wants to do but he was more in depth with exactly what he wanted for each student... not to lump them in all together but let each one demonstrate their strengths and weaknesses and then he focuses on that area with them so they can grow and not be held back ...so that was a positive for me.

**Bryan:** Mrs. Aretha, what do you mean it was the same for you?

**Mrs. Aretha:** I mean I feel relieved...just knowing Mr. Tal is Maurice teacher.

**Bryan:** Why though?

**Mrs. Aretha:** When my children was in school, I had bad experiences with other people. Sometimes, they was mistreated and treated bad too.

**Bryan:** I guess I should asked who treated them badly.

**Mrs. Aretha:** Well my children had mostly White teachers and they did well in school but I had to come to school for a lot for things... and with Mr. Tal I don't have to. He call and talk about Maurice...and if there's a problem I talk with Maurice about it and it's over. So you know I just feel better knowing Mr. Tal is his teacher.

Given the responsibility of raising her grandson, Mrs. Aretha acknowledges how comfortable she was when she first met Mr. Tal. She perceived him to interact well with Maurice and found him very organized at the beginning of the school year. Based on her perception, Mr. Tal had a collective plan for all students, but seemingly had an individual plan for each student, which catered to both their strengths and weaknesses. She admits that such interactions and organization was quite different from what she had previously experienced with teachers, based on her previous experiences with her children in schools. She described White teachers as mistreating her children, which gave her a history of experiences of White racial violence she brought to her grandson's schooling experience. Therefore, she found relief in Mr. Tal. Historically, some White teachers (and people in general) have always enacted White racial violence against Black children in schools, which started once schools were integrated (Butchart, 2010; Foster, 1997). Leonardo and Boas (2013) metaphorically argue that while White men, because of White male privilege in society, carry guns, White women teachers are often individuals who 'pull the trigger,' as they enact anti-Black violence towards Black children in schools.

While some studies have elicited the voices of Black mothers and other family members relative to how White teachers (and administrators) in K-12 schools have mistreated Black children (Reynolds, 2010), my study elicits the voices of grandmothers and other family members who may serve in the capacity of biological mothers and fathers for Black male and other students of color regarding their experiences with White teachers.

### **Chapter Summary**

Mr. Tal is as a pedagogue who sees the potential in his Black male kindergarten students. He developed this dynamic view of Black male students and their parents from his participation in the *Call Me Mister Program* and his former Black female social studies teacher. In light of the challenges he faced in life, he motivates his students and teaches them to be resilient during hard times. At the same time, he understands how critically raced his life is and uses such understanding to re-shape curricular experiences for his Black male students. Moreover, his Black parents are a vital part of his classroom. While Mr. Tal sees himself as fictive kin in the lives of his Black male students, his Black male students perceives him to be a pedagogue who uses culturally relevant and Black masculine practices in his classroom. Black parents perceive him to represent Black men well and perceive him to minimize their distrust for White teachers. I now turn to Chapter Nine, which serves as the synthesis and discussion sections of this study.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **SYNTHESIS AND DISCUSSION OF MAJOR FINDINGS**

In chapters 6-8, I introduced counterstories for Mr. Javien, Mr. Henry, and Mr. Tal with the intent of describing their perceptions of their identities and pedagogical styles and how Black male students and family members perceived those conceptions. However, in Chapter 9, I provide a synthesis of major findings relative to all three Black male kindergarten teachers, within and across groups of participants including teachers, students, and family members. In this study, I intentionally amplified and centered Black male students since they are often invisible in the curriculum and overlooked or negatively positioned in most classrooms. Therefore, even though girls and other ethnicities were present, the counterstories were focused on Black males in a non-pathological manner. This is an intentional way to encourage a paradigm shift in regards to Black male teachers and students (Hopkins, 1997; Howard, 2014).

However, before I discuss and synthesize the major themes and findings of this study, I first revisit the purpose of this study I introduced in Chapter 1. Second, I briefly re-introduce the research questions, which will guide this synthesis and discussion of findings. In synthesizing and discussing the study, I draw from my data to assist me in answering each of the subsequent research questions. Finally, I briefly re-introduce the major themes and findings as outlined in Chapter 5.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine the identities, the ability to support Black male students' success, and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers who influence the academic achievement outcomes among young Black males. This study captured performative counterstories of culturally relevant Black male kindergarten teachers, which demonstrated their ability to positively impact young Black males academically and engage in culturally relevant teaching.

## **Re-Introduction of Research Questions**

To determine the constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers, I reintroduce the following questions that guide this study.

- 1.) How do Black male kindergarten teachers perceive, and respond to predetermined positioning of Black male teachers as social change agents (i.e., role models and/or father figures)?
- 2.) What are the constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers who influence the academic achievement outcomes among Black males?
- 3.) How do Black male students perceive the identities, the ability to support their academic success, and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers?
- 4.) How do Black family members perceive the identities, the ability to support Black male students' academic success, and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers?

In Chapter 5 of this present study, I provided a brief overview of the findings. Therefore, I re-introduce major themes and findings, which were previously introduced in that chapter. Two themes were found regarding how Black male kindergarten teachers

respond to the traditional positioning of Black male teachers; one regarding Black male kindergarten teachers' perceptions of their identities and pedagogical styles; one regarding how Black male kindergarteners perceive the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers; and two regarding how Black family members perceive the identities and pedagogical style of Black male kindergarten teachers. Each of these themes will be discussed in the subsequent sections. Readers may also refer to Tables 5.1- 5.6 in Chapter 5. My interpretation of the findings is based on the data from interviews, focus groups, document analysis and observations based on the experiences of the Black male teachers, students, and family members. To that end, I provide an analysis of these experiences as constructed within the interpretations of Black masculinity, Fictive Kinship Network, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, and Critical Race Theory. I now re-introduce the major themes found in this study.

### **Re-Introduction of Major Findings**

#### **Two Major Themes Regarding Black Male Teachers' Perceptions of Their Roles**

1. Black male teacher as fictive brothers/fathers who understand their roles in the lives of Black male.
2. Black male kindergarten teachers self-identify as fictive kin who foster collaboration and build solidarity with the Black community.

#### **One Major Theme Regarding Black Male Teachers' Perceptions of Their Identities and Pedagogical Styles**

3. Black male kindergarten teachers are pedagogues of culturally relevant classroom management practices in early childhood classrooms.

### **One Major Theme Regarding Black Male Kindergarteners' Perceptions of the Identities and Pedagogical Styles of Black Male Kindergarten Teachers**

4. Black male kindergartener teachers perceive Black male kindergarteners teachers to be pedagogues of hip-hop and sports as literacy practices.

### **Two Major Themes Regarding Black Family Members' Perceptions Of The Identities and Pedagogical Styles of Black Male Kindergarten Teachers**

5. Black family members perceive Black male kindergarten teachers to be Role Models who represent positive images of Black manhood from dynamic and deficit perspectives.
6. Black family members perceive Black male kindergarten teachers to be Role Models who minimize Black family members' distrust of White female teachers.

### **Synthesis and Discussion of Major Findings**

#### **Research Question 1: How do Black male kindergarten teachers perceive, and respond to predetermined positioning of Black male teachers as social change agents (i.e. role models and/or father figures)?**

In this present study, Black male kindergarten teachers self-identified as fictive kin in the lives of their Black male kindergarteners. They also fostered collaboration with and built solidarity with the Black community to support Black male kindergartners in early childhood classrooms. Below I address these ideas.

#### **Self-identifying as Fictive Brother/ Fathers**

The idea that Black male teachers are social change agents (i.e., father figures, coaches, and disciplinarians) in response to the deficit understandings of Black boys also became a concern among the Black men teachers in this study. During an interview in his



classroom, which led to a discussion about the role gender plays in teaching, Mr. Henry expressed typical perspectives held about Black boys and girls.

Teachers see black boys as hyper, troublemakers, black girls as talkative and catty, while their white counterparts don't have the same concerns. ...it gets worse when they move up in school.

This idea represents well-established false narratives regarding Black men and boys in the literature (Brown 2011, 2012). These dominant narratives about Black men teachers shaped the way many educators come to understand the roles of Black men teachers in schools. That is, before they enter the K-12 classroom, Black men teachers are often already positioned to discipline and control Black boys (Howard, 2011). During an informal conversation with Mr. Javien in his classroom, he spoke about how some teachers in his school think that every Black man teacher knows how to control children. He explained that teachers often send their students to him so that he can talk to them. Likewise, I also experienced this expectation when I was a teacher. Mr. Javien shared that this issue came up at a conference he attended designed for Black men teachers. He added that most of the Black men teacher conference attendees complained about this same issue. Mr. Henry also suggested a similar concern during one of our interviews in his classroom. He noted that in his former school his colleagues would always invite him to mentor “bad” Black boys because they “needed a mentor in their lives.” Such positioning is a part of the epistemic colonization of which Gordon (2006) writes or the idea that White people have always theorized the Black experience in every aspect of life. In this case (as in most cases), they have theorized inaccurately the role of the Black male teacher (Brockenbrough, 2008).

Over the past few decades, several scholars (Brown, 2011, 2012; Lynn, 2006a, b; Lynn et al., 1999; Rezai-Rashti, 2010) have attempted to disrupt this epistemic colonization to shift the narrative regarding Black men teachers with whom they have co-constructed stories about what it means to be a Black male teacher. My study continues in this line of research inquiry. As Black men scholars who study Black men teachers, we are engaging in and have engaged in what Schomburg (1992) refers to as ‘digging of one’s past’ or the idea of “remaking [the] past in order to make his future” (Grant et al., 2016, p. 2). As previously argued in the review of literature, Black men teacher historically have a history of being empowering in their approaches to teaching until school integration reshaped the way they define their roles as teachers and their interactions with Black children, particularly Black male students (Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1996, 2001). Presently in the literature, Black men describe themselves as those who enter classrooms with a multiplicity of identities that shape them as diverse individuals in classrooms and how they interact with Black male students (Brockenbrough, 2012a, b).

Mr. Henry also acknowledged similar expectations in light of him being a Black male teacher, during an interview in his classroom as he spoke about being asked to mentor ‘bad’ Black male students. He relayed that he told his colleagues on several occasions that not every Black man could relate to Black boys, particularly when teachers and other school officials continue to regard Black boys from deficit perspectives. “If teachers wanna say he [referring to Black boys] needs a role model because he ain’t got no daddy at home, I can’t in good graces be his role model because I had a daddy at home. So we gotta stop thinking about Black boys like that.” This diversity among Black

men teachers is also reflected among Black men teachers who are culturally relevant pedagogues (Brockenbrough, 2010). For example, although Mr. Tal is an emerging culturally relevant Black male teacher, he encounters challenges with one of his Black male students, Vance, with whom he was not able to connect socially. During two observations, Vance interrupted the instructional process until Mrs. Peay, the Black female teacher assistant intervened on Mr. Tal's behalf.

Black men teachers have also constructed and re-constructed themselves as culturally relevant pedagogues who do not see Black boys from deficit perspectives, but see them in dynamic ways (Lynn, 2006a, b ; Lynn et al., 1999;). Using the words of Jackson Coppin (1976) in her book. *Reminiscences of School Life and Hints on Teaching*, Black men teachers, like Black teachers in general, position themselves in such a way to help Black males and other students develop a strong sense of self-worth. Mrs. Martha, during a focus group discussion when asked about skills Mr. Javien provided her grandson (Ameer), acknowledges that Mr. Javien helps his students develop a strong sense of worth. She relates, "He tells them you are not going to bow your head and cover your mouth...talk to me." In other words, Black men teachers build in Black male students the "capacity to effectively [silence] all slanders such as 'we won't or we can't do' (Grant et al., 2016). During one of the interviews, Mr. Javien shares a story regarding how he builds resilience in his students by telling them stories about his struggles in school in order to help them work against the idea of 'we won't' or 'we can't'. He relates,

No one ever told me I was going to be a kindergarten teacher. No one ever told me I was going to be doing a master's. I had struggles in school so if I can do it,

and I had struggles, I tell them you can too. So if Mr. Javien wasn't the best reader or speller and he did it, you can do it too.

In so doing, Black men teachers, like Mr. Javien, empower Black children to reach their full potential by understanding how their lives are critically raced, gendered, and classed in American society (Lynn, 2006a, b). In his classroom, Mr. Javien explains during one of the interviews,

I tell them society has certain preconceived stereotypes about Black males. So I kinda tell stories about my personal experiences and I hope my stories help them per se to understand what's going on in the world. You don't want them to be caught off guard because it's so easy to do... So I'll tell them that everybody won't judge you by the content of your character just as a sidebar conversation or when something in the lesson leads us to talk about... I mean...I bring that consciousness because it's true.

According to Black male teachers, male students, and family members in this present study, such descriptions represent the identities and pedagogical styles of the Black male teachers. Therefore, this study continues to build on more empowering conceptions of the Black male teacher, as it, too, works against those stereotypical constructions of Black men teachers that are evident in educational scholarship. Consistent across the data in this present study is the idea that these Black men teachers are not minstrels on a stage who uphold the status quo, but they challenge traditional conceptions of Black men teachers and schooling for Black male kindergarteners by understanding their roles in the lives of and viewing Black male kindergarteners and their families from dynamic perspectives. While each of them perceives their roles differently, they never draw from

deficit constructs to explain them in the lives of Black male kindergartners and families. This is atypical of most teachers in K-12 schools who are taught to see ‘the lack of academic and cultural wealth’ instead of the academic and cultural wealth Black and other children of color bring to classrooms (Long, Souto-Manning, & Vasquez, 2016).

Mr. Javien self-identified as a “big brother” who serves as an extension of his Black male students’ homes. Most teachers do not see themselves as extensions of the homes of Black children because they perceive Black children to come from ‘culturally deprived homes and communities’. As it relates to Black male students, Sealey-Ruiz and Greene (2015) argue that media and popular press often reify such ideas, which negatively influence the ways pre-service and in-service teachers view Black male students in schools and society. During the focus group, Mrs. Cherise reflected on media negatively influence Black boys and noted that Black males are following what she considers the latest negative trends including hair dying. However, Cook (2010) and Ladson-Billings (2009) suggest that teachers who serve as fictive kin and culturally relevant pedagogues always understand their roles as neatly connected to the homes and communities of their Black children, not as ‘saviors’, but as individuals who empower Black males (and female) students to do their best in schools and society. Seamlessly, all three teachers involved themselves in children’s homes and communities in different ways. During our focus group discussion, Mrs. Martha, Ameer’s grandmother, understood Mr. Javien as being connected to the community. She explained that although Mr. Javien does not live in the community, he is always in the community. That is, he visits homes and attends local community events, which she acknowledged she appreciates as a parent. While explaining a reading initiative entitled “Mystery Readers”

he integrated into his classroom, Mr. Javien explains that he involved himself in the community in a different way. That is, he made connections with community members to support his reading initiative so students can come to value reading and individuals in their communities. He offers,

**Mr. Javien:** I wanted to involve the community and I also know for me as a child reading for me was a struggle...an issue. So when Dr. Green came...the superintendent, he was big on reading so I thought why not incorporate the community into the school through reading. So each month I invite someone in the community to come to read to the students.

Ladson-Billings (2009) explains that culturally relevant teachers, like Mr. Javien, connect teaching and learning to the community, national, and global identities of their students. In other words, they provide Black students mirrors in which to see themselves, and windows through which they see the world (Boutte, 2015; Sims-Bishop, 2012).

Describing Mr. Henry during our focus group, Mrs. Boin perceived Mr. Henry as a part of her community also, as she took pleasure in seeing him serve in other support capacities including the school's mentoring program in school and outside of the school setting. Kathey, Zion's adopted mother, acknowledged that she sees Mr. Tal intimately connected to the school and community because she has seen him at all of the school and community events. During one of the interviews, Mr. Tal corroborated Kathey's statement. He relates,

I give a lot for my students. I stay for a long time after school when other teachers pick up their stuff and leave with the children. I do this kinda stuff because I see

myself as a part of the community because as a teacher you are the community.

You mold the community.

Therefore, Mr. Tal sees his professional teaching position as having long-term impact on the community he serves. While Cook (2010)'s scholarship provides educators an initial understanding regarding how Black teachers who serve as fictive kin are connected to the Black community, my studies builds on her work to highlight Black male teachers in early childhood settings who serve as fictive kin and see their roles as connected to the Black community. Moreover, Cook's (2010) work focuses specifically on Black teachers in urban schools before, during, and after Katrina. However, considering that Mr. Javien, Mr. Henry, and Mr. Tal work in rural, urban, and suburban school settings, my study provides a more expansive view of fictive kin who work in rural, urban, and suburban schools. Clearly, this is an important addition to the research literature as the institutional challenges (i.e., poverty) Black children and teachers face in rural, suburban, and urban schools are similar, yet different in many ways (Milner, 2015). Students in rural settings may not have access to certain commodities including transportation that may be readily available to students in urban and suburban contexts (Milner, 2015). In other words, race and place is important in the examination of fictive kinship networks (Morris & Munroe, 2009).

Mr. Tal self-identifies as "a father figure" who sees "the best" and "the potential" in his Black male kindergartners. Typically, most teachers do not see the best in Black children, particularly Black male students who they deem problematic before they enter schools (Dancy, 2014; Howard, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2011). This explains why during a focus group discussion, Mrs. Felice, Joshua's mother and a public school teacher, spoke

about her experiences with White teachers who stood in her school's hallway counting the number of Black males listed on their attendance roster. Bryan and Ford (2014) contend that most teachers have been taught to devalue Black males in such a way that limits their (Black male students) potential not only in schools, but also in gifted and other academically rigorous programs including Advanced Placement (AP) courses. We (Bryan and Ford)) also argued that for this reason few Black men become teachers, particularly teachers in gifted education programs. In other words, because the schooling experiences of most Black males are so problematic, many do not want to relive the traumatizing experiences as teachers (Bryan & Ford, 2014). Cook (2010) acknowledges that Black teachers who serve as fictive kin always see potential in Black children including males, which encourages them, as teachers, to foster collaboration and build solidarity with other Black teachers to support Black children in urban schools, particularly during the most challenging times. On one occasion during a focus group discussion with family members in Mr. Tal's classroom, Mr. Raton suggests that Mr. Tal knew the potential and saw the best in his son. In so doing, he often gave him extra assignments to encourage and challenge him intellectually. Like Mr. Raton, Mrs. Felice made similar comments about her son's teacher Mr. Henry. She acknowledged that her son has really strong potential in math and that Mr. Henry cultivates that potential in his classroom. Further, describing the skills Mr. Tal provides Marquavious, Mrs. Cherise suggests that Mr. Tal "makes them see their potential."

Mr. Henry describes himself as a "father figure" whose role is complementary to the role of his Black male kindergartners' fathers. When describing Mr. Tal during the focus group, Mr. Raton perceived Mr. Tal to be a father figure who was "somebody else



there to reinforce what you're trying to instill in [him]" (referring to his son). Most teachers, including Black men teachers, do not see their roles as complementary to Black fathers due to the pervasive deficit constructions of Black fathers as portrayed via media and popular press (Brown, 2011). Most Black men teachers are middle-class men who, as a result of White Supremacy and racism have been what West and Buschendorf (2014) refer to as 'niggerized' or they are critically unconscious regarding the way White Supremacy and racism works to keep Black men divided. Ladson-Billings (2009) refers to these teachers as assimilationist teachers who work to uphold the status quo in school curriculum and practices. While many Black men teachers may have negative perceptions regarding Black fathers, educators rarely know what Black fathers think about Black men teachers, particularly those in early childhood classrooms. Although Black fathers are under-represented in my study, it still gives voice to a Black father, Mr. Raton. In a case study my colleague and I conducted on a Black male kindergarten teacher, we found that a Black male father was suspicious of a Black male kindergartener teacher in that he questioned his ability to carry out his duties as a kindergarten teacher. Mr. Raton highly respected Mr. Tal and saw his work as valuable to the lives of not only his son Braden, but also the lives of other children from culturally linguistically diverse backgrounds in Mr. Tal's classroom. In light of how Black fathers are stereotypically constructed (Coles & Green, 2009), this is an important idea because such stereotypical construction may influence how Black men teachers respond to and interact with Black fathers and children, particularly Black boys.

Mr. Henry further acknowledged that he cares for his Black male kindergarteners in the same way he cares for his biological family members. Cook (2010) contends that

fictive kin do not have deficit regards for Black families and take care of Black children in the same manner they take of their own children. However, from a Black masculinity perspective, Black men are rarely portrayed as caring for Black boys, particularly Black fathers who are stereotypically missing from the lives of Black children. Thus, to have a Black male teacher and a father who demonstrated care for Black male kindergartener serves as a counter-narrative to those deficit narratives regarding Black men and men teachers. This idea of care was evident during several classroom observations in Mr. Javien's and Mr. Henry's classroom in which they (Black male teachers) often hugged their Black male kindergarteners. Likewise, they hugged them in return. In some cases, Black male students who were not in Mr. Henry's class, found solace in breaking school rules (i.e., getting out of the lunch line) to give him a hug. This reminded me of Mr. C., my former Black male kindergarten teacher. This type of care was also evident in Mr. Tal's class in which sometimes his Black male kindergartners held his hands and sat on his lap. Most White (and Black) men who care for young children in similar ways in early childhood classrooms are stereotypically considered pedophiles and homosexuals (Lynn, 2006 a,b; Sargent, 2006). According to early childhood education scholars (Friedman, 2010; Haase, 2010; Jones, 2008; Murray, 1996; McNay, 2001; Rentzou & Ziganitidou, 2009; Skelton, 1991, 1994; Sumison, 1999, 2000; Warin, 2006), many parents are concerned when men interact with young children as such. However, during focus group discussions, none of the parents expressed concern about ways these Black male kindergarten teachers interacted with their young sons. In fact, Mrs. Boin and Mrs. Felice encouraged more Black men to the classroom to support Black boys because they are so few Black men in early childhood education. In other words, while White family

members seemingly distrust White men in early childhood education (Sargent, 2006), Black family members in the present study were comfortable with having Black men as kindergarten teachers. However, because few studies have elicited the voices of Black family members regarding such phenomenon, more studies are needed beyond this current one to determine Black family members' perspectives/ perceptions of Black men in early childhood spaces.

Although the Black male teachers in the present study sometimes used what I termed as deficit terms already found in the literature to describe their roles (i.e., role model, and father figure), they were not deficit in their approaches and practices to support Black male kindergartners in early childhood classrooms. In other words, given this study's findings, these Black men teachers were not constructing their roles based on deficit terms prominently found in the educational literature. Instead, they used empowering pedagogical practices to support Black males in the classrooms, many of which were also acknowledged by students, and family members.

In light of deficit terms regarding their roles, scholars have rarely asked Black men teachers to describe what they mean when they suggest they are 'role models,' father figures,' and 'big brothers' (Brown, 2012). Because these terms are so pervasive in describing the role of Black male teachers, it is rarely impossible to find others terms to describe them. Critical Race scholars contend that Whiteness is normalized that it is often hidden from those who are most impacted by it (Bell, 1988). However, such is not the case in terms of the way these Black men teachers self-identify in this present study. Therefore, it is essential to have Black male teachers describe what they mean when they use these terms or name their own realities in K-12 classroom, instead of having that role

define for them. Similarly, it is important for scholars to probe beneath the simple saying of the word *role models* to determine what it means for Black men teachers.

Many scholars have used a plethora of different terms to describe Black men teachers as fictive kin (Lynn, 2006b; Lynn et al., 1999). For example, Foster (1997) and Lynn (2006) have described Black men teachers as ‘otherfathers.’ Otherfathers are Role Models who take care of Black male (and female) students in schools like biological parents do at home (Lynn, 2006b). Thus, it is not my intention to suggest that my findings in this study are unique. However, my study builds on these dynamic perspectives of Black men teachers in the lives of Black children, particularly males. While building on these empowering conceptions of Black men teachers, my research positions Black men teachers in early childhood education as fictive kin. Most of the previous research literature that portrays Black men from empowering positions often excludes Black men in early childhood education (Bryan & Browder, 2013). From a Critical Race Theoretical perspective, scholars should note that the exclusion of these voices contributes to the marginalization of Black men teachers in schools, particularly in early childhood education. In other words, Black men who are already marginalized in society writ large are even more marginalized in early childhood classrooms and educational research.

From a Black masculinity perspective, Black men are rarely portrayed as those who empower each other (hook, 2004). For example, media and popular press employ images of Black-on-Black crime to contribute to false narratives that suggest Black men hate each other. Thus, this study serves to provide a counter-narrative against a pervasive narrative that has largely influence ways people view Black men. In this present study, in

each classroom, Black men teachers empowered Black boys to academic success, cultural competences, and sociopolitical awareness. This is an important idea because Black men are stereotypically positioned as uninvolved in the lives of Black children, particularly Black boys (Brown, 2012; CDC, 2015). While portraying Black men as fictive brothers/fathers is an essential component of this study, Black men teachers also self-identified as those who foster collaboration and build solidarity with the Black community to support Black male kindergarteners in early childhood classroom.

### **Self-identifying as Fictive Kin Who Fosters Collaboration and Building Solidarity With the Black Community**

Boutte (2015) and Boutte and Hill (2006) acknowledge that most teachers do not value the wealth of wisdom in the Black community. Findings from the present study illuminate some of the teachers that *do* value this understand that there is indeed much wisdom in Black communities. In this present study, all 3 of the Black male kindergarten teachers drew from the wealth and wisdom of their biological parents and former Black teachers. As shown in the quote below, Mr. Javien integrated debate and dialogue into his classroom--practices he learned from his parents.

I try to make it like a family where we come to the table and have discussion.

That's how I was raised. We came to the table. We had family time. I would debate with my parents. Would I always win? No! That is why I encourage my students to have the opportunity to express themselves.

Mrs. Martha furthers this idea as she speaks about her grandson.

He's got the academic level of second, third grade. Socially when he came into kindergarten he had... he would just basically just play by himself but Mr. Javien

got him talking to him. He got him interacting with the class more. He got him to the point where he is talking too much...

Mr. Javien integrated a component of the Black community (i.e., dialogue and debates, etc.) that has been always useful in the educational process of Black children (Boykin, 1994; King, 2005). Before Africans were enslaved, African griots were known to tell stories, which were passed along from generation to generation to engage Africans in dialogue. Such dialogues continued on slave plantation where enslaved African strategized their way to freedom (Williams, 2005). Black men and women teachers including Anna Julia Cooper, Jackson Coppin, W. E. DuBois, Booker T. Washington and nameless others contributed to some of the greatest debates, dialogues, and discussions regarding the purpose of Black education (DuBois, 1903, 1906, Washington, 1901). Therefore, my study continues to build on the use of debates and discussions in the educational process of Black children, particularly during the early childhood years. Similar to the experiences of Black children in general in K-12 schools, the voices of young children have often been marginalized. Thus, Mr. Javien sees dialogues as a way to give voice to his Black male students. It is clear that in this present study and others (Anderson, 2015; Hopkins, 1997; Howard, 2014) that Black male students desired to be listen to, heard and understood.

On another note, Mrs. Martha sees such open communication, dialogue, debates, and discussions as a powerful tool in developing her grandson's (Ameer ) social skills, particularly since he has Asperger's Syndrome. While some studies have documented Black men teachers in special education and how they influence Black children (Lynn, Johnson, & Hassan, 1999), my study adds to the body of educational research that

demonstrate Black men teachers' potential to assist in developing social skills among Black male students --even students with disabilities.

Mr. Henry also added that he learned to care for the Black male kindergarteners in his classroom because his biological parents taught him how to care for people in general. Mrs. Felice spoke about this care in an empowering way during our focus group discussion.

Well, everyday...it's just so happen that we arrive early to school and we would arrive at the same time Mr. Henry would arrive...around the same time everyday. He would always ...even if he was all the way in the school, he would stop and walk back to my car and gather up my son and walk him in the building. He doesn't have to do that but when he saw that he was coming he would come back and walk and walk with him and give him a big hug. That just showed me a lot because he didn't have to do that. He was walking him to the morning program so he was not even going to the same place in the building in the morning but he would take him in and talk to him about his morning. I really appreciated that. A lot of mornings when we were running behind, my son said, 'We're going to miss Mr. Henry.' He really looked forward to that. I think it made him feel special. I don't even think that Mr. Henry was conscious he was doing it. I think he just saw his student and just waited on him. That shows a lot of caring that he did that.

Mr. Henry enacted a powerful conception of care that he learned from his parents. Black mothers and fathers teach many skills including caring and sharing their wisdom and knowledge with their Black sons and daughters (Coates, 2015). In most cases, they are rarely given credit for those positive contributions to the lives of their children (Boutte &

Johnson, 2013; Reynolds, 2010). Thus, while research on culturally relevant/responsive pedagogies has explored ‘care’ from a culturally relevant perspective for Black children, it is not always apparent who influenced the care these culturally relevant teachers provide to Black children in classrooms. However, the findings from the present study make it explicit that Mr. Henry developed the sense of care he enacts in his kindergarten classroom from his parents’ wisdom.

Although Mr. Henry and Mr. Javien value care in their early childhood teaching experiences, they enact care differently across classrooms. Mr. Henry sees care as empowering children to become independent; whereas, Mr. Javien engages in an indirect form of care directly through family members to support Black male kindergarteners in classroom. Thus, these conceptions of care are important to deepen understandings relative to how Black men teachers may enact nurturing in early childhood classrooms.

In this present study, Black men kindergarten teachers also suggested that they fostered collaboration and built solidarity with the Black community through former Black teachers. Mr. Tal acknowledges Mrs. Hairfield during the interview.

Mrs. Hairfield taught Social Studies. Math and reading were my very strong areas but the way she taught Social Studies, it was very relevant. I learned a lot of Black history facts. It was ... It was something that I felt like I always wanted to know more about what she doing. It was something that applied to a real world situation. So I want my students to experience the same so they can say I impacted their lives in the same way.

Mr. Javien furthers this idea regarding fostering collaboration and building solidarity with former Black teachers to support his Black male kindergarteners.



They had high expectation for all students but they also know what high expectations meant for each student. It may have been more or less for each individual. I can remember some of them calling my parents to tell them I could have done a lot better and that I was doing the bare minimum. So I have expectations. You [referring to his students] may not reach them the way I want you to reach them or at the time I want you to reach them but you're going to reach them or you're going to attempt to reach them. And when you're attempting to reach them, I'll meet you half way. If you can do your personal best, I'm fine with that per se.

Mr. Tal suggests that his former Black female teacher, Mrs. Hairfield, informed the way he shapes experiences for his Black male kindergarteners in his classroom. Likewise, Mr. Javien acknowledges that he has high expectations of his students in the same way his former Black teachers held high expectations for his classmates and him, both individually and collectively. Cook (2010) describes teachers who are fictive kin as those who foster collaboration and build solidarity with other Black teachers in schools to support Black students in urban classrooms. My work builds on her work in that it demonstrates Black male kindergarten teachers who foster collaboration and build solidarity with former teachers to inform his pedagogical practices and high expectations in their early childhood classrooms to support Black males specifically. Findings from the present study are essential to the literature because they make it evident the roles of Black men teachers as fictive kin who foster collaboration and build solidarity in specifically early childhood classrooms. The idea of fictive kin that fosters collaboration and builds solidarity with the Black community is an important concept to consider

because Black and other communities of color are typically not valued in K-12 schools in such a way to inform pedagogies and practices (Boutte, 2015; Boutte & Johnson, 2013). In the next section, I explore the constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers.

**Research Question 2: What are the constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male teachers who influence the academic achievement outcomes among Black males?**

One of the goals of this study was to determine the constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers in this study. Based on their self-identity, Black male kindergarten teachers self-identifies as pedagogues of culturally relevant classroom management practices to support Black male kindergarteners. Below I synthesize and discuss this theme.

**Pedagogues of Culturally Relevant Classroom Management Practices to Support Black Male Kindergarteners**

Milner and Tenore (2010) suggest that in order to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline, reduce suspension and expulsion for Black and other children of color, teachers should explore ways to embrace more culturally relevant classroom management approaches in K-12 classrooms. This is an important consideration in K-12 education as young Black boys are suspended disproportionately as early as early childhood education programs. A recent *Washington Post* new story indicated that a three-year old Black, male, preschool child had been suspended five times from his preschool program in one school year (Powell, 2014). This is the in-school reality of many Black and Brown in Pre-K-12 schools (Schott Foundation, 2014). In the present study, consistent across the data,

were strategies that the three Black male teachers used to support their Black male kindergarteners. During several classroom observations, it was evident that Mr. Javien resorted to involving family members in his classroom management program by calling them to inform them about their child's behavior in class (as pointed out by two of the parents in the dialogue below).

**Mrs. Cherise:** Right! He is not going to play around with them. He is going to tell them what it is and how it is.

**Mrs. Martha:** And the children takes it in. They takes it in. One day my grandson was acting out in class, he got very scared when Mr. Javien said I am going to call your grandmomma. Mr. Javien had just called the teacher next door but my grandson thought he had call me. So when he got home he was scared thinking that Mr. Javien had call me.

**Mrs. Cherise:** That goes to show how he is about discipline in a different way. Mrs. Cherise and Mrs. Martha acknowledge not only Mr. Javien's patience with Black male kindergarteners, but also his non-traditional approach to classroom management. Mrs. Cherise further adds that his approach is not a punitive approach. This approach is antithetical to what traditionally happens in schools for Black boys. Black boys are seen as the 'problem' before they become the 'problem' (Dancy, 2014). Mr. Javien also spoke to his students about their behavioral responsibilities as another classroom management strategy. He suggested that he desires to help his Black male kindergarteners understand issues before consequences are enacted. He added that he would like for them to have different experiences in his classroom than what some Black males experience in the streets where police shoot Black men and explain later. Thus, while many individuals are

rallying in the streets of America as a part of the Black Live Matter Movement (Taylor, 2016), Mr. Javien is rallying in early childhood classrooms for them.

During several observations in Mr. Henry's class, it was evident that, like Mr. Javien, he spent a lot of time talking to his Black male students about their behavioral responsibilities. During a classroom observation of a math lesson, Joshua was excited about demonstrating his academic prowess in math. He yelled out responses, after being warned several times. Joshua continued. Mr. Henry continued to warn Joshua about his behavior. On another occasion, a Black male student, Mario, was playing on the carpet and he unintentionally hit another student. Mr. Henry warned Mario not to be playful on the carpet. Mario continued to play around on the carpet. Mr. Henry responded, "Come on, Mario, come on!" This was another way to warn him of his behavioral responsibilities in class. Mrs. Boin spoke about the flexibility regarding Mr. Henry's discipline approach, which she recognizes is quite different from other teachers. She relates,

What happens is when he is discipline for being bored and acting out, he starts to suppress his intelligence. So he drags out the work because he knows if he finishes early he's going to talk and he's going to be in trouble. I think teachers need to do more to recognize brilliance in Black students. I'm not talking about Mr. Henry because he is flexible with discipline and recognizes what's going on with my son. I don't think most teachers assess Black males like they should and they get stifled early and it just continues on and they never reach their potential...or the potential they have because they get in trouble for being smart. I worry about that a lot with my son as he progresses.

Mrs. Boin recognized that classroom management practices in general are not supportive of Black male students, which hinders them from meeting their full potential in classrooms. However, she acknowledged the support of Mr. Henry, whom she perceived to understand her son, Roland.

Like Mr. Henry and Mr. Javien, Mr. Tal also spends time talking to the Black male students in his classroom. During a classroom observation, Mr. Tal engaged in conversation with a group of three Black males who were going to speech class. Apparently, they had been interrupting previous lessons in speech. Before Mr. Tal allowed the students to depart with the speech teacher, he pulled them aside to remind them of their behavioral expectations and responsibilities. He remarked, in closing his conversation with them, “She’s here to help you so behave in class!” However, these conversations were not always successful for Mr. Tal. During two classroom observations, Mr. Tal had much difficulty supporting Vance who interrupted instructions for an extended period of time by meandering throughout the classroom. At that juncture, Mr. Tal depended on the expertise of his Black female assistant, Mrs. Peay, who is also fictive kin, to assist him with Vance. The collaboration between Mr. Tal and Mrs. Peay, not only represents the fictive kinship network essential to supporting children, but also represents the idea of communalism drawn from the dimensions of Black culture (Boutte, 2015; Boykin, 1994; Cook, 2010; Hale, 2001; Hilliard, 1992; King, 2005).

However, despite challenges with Vance, Mr. Tal never sent his students out of the classroom for behavioral infractions. He found ways to negotiate them in his classroom. During a focus group discussion, Mr. Raton suggested that Mr. Tal also called

family members when students broke classroom rules. He reported that he gave Mr. Tal permission to “reel” Braden in, knowing that Braden is active.

While each of these teachers used similar styles of classroom management, it is evident that the majority of the approaches were effective. From a culturally relevant perspective, culturally relevant pedagogues know how to engage in classroom management practices that support children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

**Research Question 3: How do Black male students perceive the identities, the ability to support their academic success, and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers?**

Often, Black and other children of color do not have opportunities to provide their perceptions relative to their teachers (Boutte & Hill, 2006). This is particularly true for Black children in early childhood classrooms. Most of the attention, theories, and schooling practices have focused primarily on White middle-class children, as if Black (children’s) lives do not matter in early childhood education (Boutte, 2015). Boutte (2015) contends they do matter. Building on previous scholarship (e.g., Anderson, 2015; Hopkins, 1997; Howard, 2014) which elicited the voices of children who have been historically marginalized in schools and society writ large, I explored the perceptions of Black male kindergarten children regarding their Black male teachers’ identities and pedagogical styles. An important finding was that Black male kindergartners perceived their Black male teachers to be pedagogues of hip-hop and sports literacies.

## **Pedagogues of Hip-hop as a Literacy Practice**

There is a false narrative about Black boys, which suggests that they do not and cannot read (Haddix, 2009; Tatum, 2009). However, in this present study, Black male kindergartners were interested in literacy because their teachers drew from the wealth and wisdom of their communities to support literacy practices. When asked about strategies that were effective with Black male students during the focus group discussions, one of the teachers (Mr. Henry) related, “So [I give] stuff they can relate to better. So [I] give them more stuff that pertains to them and using names of rapper they may know... Lil Wayne. Now they’re focus because there is a connection.” During the focus group discussion, Mrs. Boin expresses her excitement this academic school because her son, Roland, and daughter had male teachers who integrated rap into the curriculum. Ameer, explained that Mr. Javien introduces hip-hop music into the classrooms when he reads books. He perceived that Mr. Tal read the “fun books”, when he integrates hip-hop into literacy. When he spoke about his favorite book, *Give a Dog A Bone*, during the focus group discussion, Mario contended that Mr. Henry enabled him to make a rap using the rhyming words from his favorite book. Mr. Javien, during a classroom observation, used Bruno Mars and music from Funk town to teach sight words to his Black male and female students. Thus, hip-hop as a literacy tool is consistent across all three Black male teachers.

Media and popular press have historically scrutinized hip-hop music for negatively influencing the lives of Black youth, particularly Black male youth. There are many studies that stereotypically connect hip-hop music to violence, disrespect of women, profanity, and drugs, to say the least (Hill, 2009). However, hip-hop music

historically has consisted of a sociopolitical component, which enables and has enabled hip-hoppers to challenge the status quo in regards to White Supremacy, racism, and police brutality in Black and Brown communities (Hill, 2009). And for this reason, James Baldwin (1955) poignantly stated, “I love America more than any other country in this world, and exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually (p. 9).” Ladson-Billings (2009) acknowledges that teachers must encourage sociopolitical awareness in classrooms to help students understand how their lives are raced, gendered, and classes, and how these constructions influence their lives daily. She encourages the remix of culturally relevant pedagogy in which hip-hop (and spoken word) are used as tools to challenge social inequities (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Thus, teachers should be encouraged to use these tools to not only support the global identities of Black (and White) children, but also to help them build sociopolitical consciousness as they help them to become academically successful and culturally competent (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012). I agree with KRS-One who suggests that if hip-hop has the power to corrupt minds as so many people contend, it also has the power and potential to uplift minds in schools and society writ large (KRS-One, 2003).

Considering that many White children have gravitated toward and are gravitating towards hip-hop music, they, too, can develop sociopolitical consciousness regarding White Supremacy, racism, and other social inequities that negatively influence their lives and the lives of Black and Brown children (Paris, 2012). Such idea could help them work against what King (1991) refers to as an “uncritical habit of mind” or dyconscious racism most White people possess. If educators are to facilitate the growth of new human beings who are socio-politically aware, it must start in early childhood classrooms where



Whiteness begins to infiltrate into schools. Such infiltration has the potential to perpetuate a cycle of deficit thinking that promulgates White superiority and Black inferiority. These ideas move both Black and White children away from reaching their full humanity and racial healing (Boutte, 2015; Dillard, 2012). While many scholars may suggest that children are not aware of racial and other differences, they do recognize color, race, and cultural differences (Boutte, Lopez-Robertson, & Powers-Costello, 2011). They, too, become actors and actresses in racialized performances. This idea explains why Mrs. Cherise, during a focus group, highlighted the following incident:

I notice like if we are in Parrington County (pseudonym) or somewhere and say like we go to a public playground the white kids do not interact with my kids so you can tell at home they were talked about Black kids. But, my baby don't know so he will go up and play with them.

These kinds are racial microgressions of which Mrs. Cherise are not only evident on playgrounds, but also visible in schools. When asked about her fears regarding her adopted son, Zion, during a focus group discussion, Mrs. Kathey, a White adopted mother, also acknowledged the racial microaggressions that he faced at church. She explains,

Well I... I'm always worried about ... I watch a lot of the white children...how they treat...you know sometimes they're fine...like at my church they're real good but there's a couple of 'em [them] that you can tell are a little prejudice. I guess they've been raised that way... you know but they're coming around. You know I noticed that the other day. I think I worry about the way people are going to treat him and his sister.

In the same conversation, she acknowledged her own tendency towards racism,

Like I said there's still a lot of prejudice. All we can do is pray about it. And if I must say so I didn't think I was prejudice but I think at one time I must've been. Therefore, from one generation to the next, White children (and people in general) are socialized into White Supremacist understandings, which are historically and pervasively interwoven into the American structure (Bell, 1988). Thus, while I do not acknowledge ways Mr. Javien, Mr. Henry, and Mr. Tal utilize hip-hop and literacy to support the learning and sociopolitical consciousness of their White students, hip-hop can also be useful in classrooms for them. Another topic that warrants further study is how Black male teachers engage White children in hip-hop literacies in early childhood classrooms.

Because White and Black teachers are given the responsibility of molding minds and shaping lives for the future, they must come to understand the importance of disrupting the cycle of White Supremacy in school curriculum and practices. Mr. Javien's, Mr. Henry's, and Mr. Tal's use of hip-hop and literacy in early childhood classrooms challenges the status quo regarding literacy in early childhood education. This is not typical in most early childhood classrooms. In 1933, Carter G. Woodson wrote:

The educational system as it has developed both in Europe and America [is] an antiquated process which does not hit the mark even in the case of the needs of the White man himself. If the White man wants to hold on to it, let him do so; but [Black people] . . . should develop and carry out a program of [their] own. (p. 12)

It is clear that these Black male kindergarten teachers have come to understand the importance of working against traditional curricular experiences for Black male students. In fact, Mr. Tal explicated such understandings during an interview in his classroom

where he explains that Black children including Black males are not positively represented in school curriculum and that curriculum he is expected to use do not represent his Black children's experiences.

You feel like you were missing that opportunity when you were going through school and now that you have the opportunity to try to eradicate some of the things...some of the teaching styles and practices that happened to you...you have a chance to eradicate and demystify those things and try to evoke a new teaching paradigm in that... you know... teaching is a... not always...you know traditionally you go through a teacher education program but even with that, your teaching styles are not even appreciated within that.

Mr. Tal recognizes the historical legacy of White Supremacy in school curriculum that was not only evident in his schooling experiences, but also evident in the schooling experiences of his Black male students. I applaud the efforts of Mr. Tal and the other Black male teachers in this study. However, such attempts to circumvent traditional classroom curricular practices cannot be relegated to Black male teachers who are few and far between in K-12 classrooms. Black men teachers represent less than one percent of the teaching population (Aud, et al., 2012; Brown, 2012; Bryan & Browder, 2013; Bryan & Ford, 2014; Dancy, 2014; Lynn, 2006a, b). All teachers must teach in such a way as all lives, especially Black Lives Matter [emphasis added] in early childhood education. Pre-service teaching education programs must prepare teachers to infuse culturally relevant practices into school curricula (Boutte, 2015; Ladson-Billings 2001, 2005a, b, 2008; Long, Souto-Manning, & Vasquez, 2016). In other words, College of Education programs, particularly at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), must move

beyond mission statements that emphasize the importance of addressing issues of diversity and social inequities in pre-service teacher education programs and become serious about engaging in critical praxis in teacher education curricula regarding these issues (Boutte & Jackson, 2014).

### **Pedagogues of Sports as a Literacy and Math Practice**

Black male kindergarteners also perceived their teachers to use sports as both a culturally relevant and Black masculine literacy tool. Kindergartener Braden noted during a focus group discussion that Mr. Tal gave him 15 race-car books to take home, which encouraged him to read. During one of the interviews in his classroom, Mr. Tal suggests that he used race cars as a motivational tool to encourage a Black male student who did not like writing to help him engage in the writing process and develop a love for it. During a math lesson in his kindergarten classroom, Mr. Henry drew basketballs on the Smart Board to explain a math problem. During the same lesson, Joshua acknowledges that Mr. Henry “was really good at drawing basketballs.” Suggesting that Mr. Javien allowed him to read books about Michael Jordan, a former basketball player, Marquavious detailed what he learned about Michael Jordan during a focus group discussion in his classroom. Thus, these Black men kindergarten teachers used sports to facilitate instructions in both literacy and math.

Lee (2007) notes the importance of connecting literacy to the cultural realities of Black children including sports in order to make teaching and learning culturally responsive to them. While sports have been rarely theorized as Black masculine literacies or literacies that support the masculine identities of Black boys, it, too, can serve as Black masculine literacies to support Black boys in classroom. It is clear that all boys are not

interested in sports (Howard, 2014). According to Black masculinity scholars (Howard, 2014; Lynn, 2006a, b), to suggest otherwise is to essentialize the experiences of Black males, which minimizes the diversity that exist among them (Howard, 2014). However, for those who are interested in sports, it can serve as a Black masculine literacy tool, particularly considering the interest of most boys in sports.

Howard (2014) criticizes the overemphasis of sports among Black male students. He contends that Black male students should become more interested in academics instead of sports, because few Black males actually become professional athletes. That is, adults should help Black males critique the sociopolitical aspects of the sports industry, help them understand that most people will not become sports professionals, and deepen their understanding relative to the exploitation of Black (male) bodies that is at the core of professional sports. Singer (2015) also speaks to the miseducation of Black athletes because of institutional factors (i.e., capitalism) that have influenced Black males to become athletes instead of scholars. However, based on the results of this study, it is clear that sports and academic can be beneficial and interconnected to support Black boys academically in schools. In other words, educators can prepare Black males to become both athletes and academicians in K-12 schools to support them. Both skills may be important to Black boys. Lewis et al., (2009) explained the benefits of recruiting and retaining Black male athletes to K-12 classrooms.

Like Howard's (2014) critique of Black parents for pushing their Black sons into sports, Mrs. Cherise and Mrs. Martha had similar sentiments.

**Mrs. Martha:** Are there any programs in middle and high school to steer them in the right direction? Instead of us pushing our young Black men into something

academic, we tell them to go get that ball in your [their] hand. If it's not that then they are in the streets.

**Mrs. Cherise:** Yes, because we see sports as a way out of their situations more so than academics. They see a lot of the sports figures on TV...so that is always in their face but they don't show them that some of the sport figures have college degrees or they are very educated. That part they don't see.

Although she acknowledges that her nephew is a gifted athlete and scholar, Mrs. April also felt that Black parents pushed their Black males into sports more so than encourage them to pursue academics. However, Mrs. Boin felt that sports for important to her son and also felt it was instrumental to supporting her Roland's interest in school. Findings in the present study build on Howard's (2014) work by integrating the perceptions of Black family members whose sons are in early childhood education. It becomes evident that the perspectives of Black parents are in no way monolithic and that multiple perspectives are held on many topics. This is the complex terrain that culturally relevant pedagogues navigate in their classrooms.

While there is a growing body of educational studies on culturally relevant and Black masculine literacy practices in K-12 schools (Haddix, 2009; Kirkland, 2011), there are limited studies that demonstrate ways young Black male learners use hip-hop, and sports to inform their learning in literacy. My study adds to the academic work of many culturally relevant literacy and Black masculine scholars (Haddix, 2009; Kirkland, 2011, 2009) who explore literacy practices among Black male students in that it is inclusive of ways Black male kindergarteners use and Black male teacher encourage culturally relevant and Black masculine literacy practices in early childhood classrooms. Similar to

the importance of integrating Black male students voices in educational research, it is also important to infuse voices of Black family members regarding their perceptions of the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers.

**Research Question 4: How do Black family members perceive the identities, the ability to support students' academic success, and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers?**

Like Black children, Black family members rarely have opportunities to express their perceptions of teachers in K-12 schools (Reynolds, 2010). In this present study, Black family members perceived Black male kindergarten teachers as pedagogues who represent positive images of Black manhood for Black male kindergartener from both dynamic and deficit perspective. Moreover, they perceived Black male kindergarteners to be pedagogues who helped to minimize their distrust for White teachers. I explore each of themes in the next section.

**Pedagogues Who Represent Positive Images of Black Manhood from Dynamic and Deficit Perspectives**

Most Black men teachers are perceived as role models in the lives of Black children, unless they self-identify and/or perceived as gay (Brockenbrough, 2008; Brown, 2012; Rezai-Rashti, 2010). However, it is rare to have Black family members describe them as such in the academic literature. In this present study, Black family members perceive Black male teachers to be role models who represent positive images of Black manhood. During a focus group discussion in Mr. Tal's class, Mr. Raton described Mr. Tal as a positive role model who defied every stereotype regarding Black men as portrayed in media and popular press. He suggested that despite ways the media positions

Black men, Mr. Tal provided a real life example to his Black male students regarding who they could become in society. Mrs. Felice conveyed that she intentionally wanted Joshua to be in Mr. Henry's classroom because Mr. Henry also provided an image of a professional Black man teacher. She further suggested that although Joshua's father is also a professional man, she felt as if an additional image of a professional Black man could help shape Joshua's perception of Black men. These family members drew from dynamic perceptions of Black men. While Mrs. Martha and Mrs. Cherise viewed Mr. Javien as a role model who represented positive images of Black manhood, they perceived his role in such a way to admonish Black male students 'who not to become' in regards to Black men in general. They regarded Mr. Javien as different from Black men who worn "sagging pants," "grills," and "sneakers." Mrs. Martha suggested that Mr. Javien modeled to his Black male students how to be "gentlemen" and not "thugs." Although I understand clearly that Mrs. Martha and Mrs. Cherise's responses are grounded in their concerns regarding Black men and boys, I perceive their responses to be still grounded in White expectations for the Black male body. Black men have the right to dress any way they choose without scrutiny on the part of White neither Black people. In fact, I clearly understand that all of us as human beings have this *right*. However, there are real consequences, which are only promulgated as a result of White Supremacy (Coates, 2015). My study builds on the work of scholars who have elicited the voices of Black family members. However, few studies have explored Black family members regarding Black teachers, particularly Black men teachers in general and Black men teachers in early childhood education. This idea is an important exploration as many



people including Black family members perceive Black men teachers to be role models for Black male students.

In this study, Black male kindergarteners had very positive relationships with their Black male teachers, which often produce relationships beyond the classroom. During several informal conversations, Mr. Tal acknowledged that he spent time attending baseball and basketball games of his students. Mr. Henry attended sports activities including basketball games after school hours. Mr. Javien mentors Black male students after school. Thus, while the Black men teachers perceived their roles as fictive kin in the lives of Black male students, Black males students also perceived fictive kin relationships between them and their Black male kindergarten teachers. They knew a lot of personal information about their Black male teachers. For example, Black male students in Mr. Henry's class knew he played football in high school and college and served as a football coach in local school district. Most of them felt comfortable scrutinizing their teachers in ways that may have been perceived as reprehensible in other classrooms. Moreover, Cameron scrutinizes Mr. Tal's basketball skills during a focus group discussion. Similarly, Demarcus scrutinized Mr. Javien for not being "good" at playing basketball.

Some of the Black family members in this present study also recognized the positive relationships their sons had with their Black male kindergarten teachers. During a focus group discussion, Mr. Raton suggested that he could tell when Mr. Tal was absent from school because his son Braden would always say, 'I can't wait until Mr. Tal come back to school'. Mrs. Boin inferred that her son, Roland, was motivated to go to school when she told him he was going to see Mr. Henry. Mr. Cherise related, "My son...

everything...everything... Mr. Javien says, he say 'Mr. Javien says, Mr. Javien says'.

Brockenbrough's (2012c) and Howard's (2012) research that suggests that some Black male students may have constrained relationships with Black male students. Because my work focused on Black male students in early childhood education and their work on Black males in middle schools, I continue to explore Black male teachers' relationship with Black boys. The subsequent section examines Black men kindergarten teachers as pedagogues who helped to minimize Black family members' distrust for White female teachers.

### **Pedagogues Who Minimize Black Family Members' Distrust of White Female Teachers**

"What do you do when you have white teachers who don't like black, I mean Black children?" This was a powerful question asked by Mrs. Cherise during a focus group discussion in response to Mrs. Martha's statement regarding the need for more Black male teachers in schools. This question led to Mrs. Martha's experiences with White teachers and other educational professionals in school during the focus group discussion. In her capacity of a former substitute teacher, she recalls White teachers who mistreated Black boys by yelling at them in ways they did not yell at White male students who engaged in similar behavioral infractions. During a focus group discussion in Mr. Henry's class, Mrs. Felice, who is also a teacher, shared her experiences with White female teachers who stand in the school's hallways counting the number of Black male students they have on their class rosters because they do not want them in their classes. When asked why he was relieved when he discovered Mr. Tal was Bradon's teachers during the focus group discussion, Mr. Raton recalled his personal schooling experiences

where White teachers were unable to relate to his classmates and him. He suggested that they did not understand [Black] culture and would easily ‘write them up’ (referring to Black children) when a problem arises in the classroom. Critical race scholars have described these actions as racial microaggressions or small racial putdowns that people of color face every day. And, because of these and other racialized experiences, Bell (1988) asserted that racism is a permanent structure in the American backdrop. Like Mr. Raton, many of the Black family felt some relief because they perceived that having a Black male teacher would minimize such racial microaggressions they and their sons would face. In fact, Mrs. Boins stated during a focus group discussion, that she did not have to worry about that (racial incidents) with Mr. Henry. Mr. Raton concurred that he did not have to worry about his son, Braden, being dismissed from the classroom. Both of the parents concerns are valid. On one hand, historically, Black teachers have protected Black children from White racial violence during segregated Black school. That is, despite messages of racial inferiority they received outside of schools, Black teachers often told Black children that they were not inferior inside of schools (Siddle-Walker, 1996, 2000). They also armed them with the appropriate academic skills, cultural competence, and sociopolitical awareness essential to surviving as Black men and women in American society (Dingus, 2006; Siddle-Walker, 1996). On the other hand, most White people, including teachers, have always been soldiers in the White racial army who inflicted racialized violence towards Black children during segregated Black schooling and integrated schooling, albeit not intentionally at times (but dysconsciously).

Presently, issues pertaining to White teachers and Black children remain at the core of educational concerns (Howard, 2012; Howard, 2014; Milner, 2010b). That is,

White teachers often engage in cultural conflicts with Black children that negatively impact their schooling experiences (Milner, 2010b). Given that most teacher education programs do address issues of equity in a substantive manner, White teachers often leave pre-service teacher education programs without exploring their privilege, stereotypes, and biases they may have in regards to Black and other children of color (Matias, 2013; Price-Dennis & Souto-Manning, 2011). Matias (2013) notes that White teachers need to “check themselves before they wreck themselves and our children” (p. 68).

The latter concern regarding the dismissal of Black male students from classrooms is of particular importance because Black male students as early as pre-school are being suspended and expelled from early childhood education programs and K-12 schools at disproportional rates in comparison to their White male counterparts (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Thus, they are being socialized into a school-to-prison pipeline that could have astronomical influence of their academic and social futures (Dancy, 2014). Many Black masculinity scholars (Dancy, 2014; Hopkins, 1997; Howard, 2014) contend that Black boys experience schools differently than all other racial groups. In other words, because they are convicted in the womb (Upchurch, 1997), they are targeted before they enter school doors (Ladson-Billings, 2011).

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this study was to determine the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers in the South. Based on this examination, Black male kindergarten teachers self-identified as fictive kin in the lives of Black male kindergartners. In so doing, they fostered collaboration and built solidarity with the Black community to support Black male kindergartners in early childhood classrooms. That is,

they drew from the wealth and wisdom of their own biological parents, former teachers and college professors to support Black male kindergartners. While the voices of Black men kindergarten teachers were important to this study, the voices of their Black male kindergartners were equally important. They perceived Black male kindergarten teachers to be pedagogues of hip-hop as a literacy tool and sports as a literacy and math tool. Finally, Black family members perceived Black male kindergarten teachers to be pedagogues who represented positive images of Black manhood from both dynamic and deficit perspectives. They also believed that Black male kindergarten teachers served as those helped minimize their distrust for White teachers. In the next chapter of this study, I conclude this study and provide implications and recommendations for future research studies.

## **CHAPTER TEN**

### **CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

In Chapter 9, I synthesized and discussed the findings of this study. Findings revealed that these Black male kindergarten teachers perceived themselves to be fictive brothers/fathers who fostered collaboration and built solidarity with the Black community to academically and socially support Black male kindergarteners in early childhood classrooms. Black male kindergarten teachers were also found to be pedagogues of culturally relevant classroom management practices. The Black male kindergartners in this study reported that their Black male teachers used hip-hop, sports, and mathematics literacies as instructional approaches. In this study, Black family members perceived Black male kindergarten teachers as Role Models who represented positive images of Black manhood for their Black male kindergarteners. They also regarded Black male kindergarten teachers as Role Models who minimized Black parents' distrust for White female teachers and other White educational professionals. In Chapter 10, it is my goal to conclude this study by providing the conclusion, implications, and future directions for educational research. I commence this chapter by sharing my concluding thoughts.

#### **Conclusion**

I conclude this study by reflecting on a story I shared earlier about my former kindergarten teacher Mr. C, and introducing another story that impacted me during this writing process. First, I share my personal reflections as a Black male kindergartener in Mr. C's class. Second, I share an experience about a 3-year old boy, Jason, whom I met

in the county library of the town in which I currently reside. These two experiences validate the importance of the role and potential of Black male teachers in early childhood classrooms. As I reflect on the story I shared about Mr. C., I often wonder what my kindergarten experiences would have been like if he had not been my teacher. Based on what I have come to understand over the years through graduate studies, it is likely that I would have had a White female teacher since more than 85% of K-12 teachers are White (Aud et al., 2013). I am sure I would have been subjected to oppressive school curricula, which devalued me as a Black male (Howard, 2014; King, 2005), though I may not have been able to articulate this at the time. Like for most Black males, kindergarten would have been the start of the school-to-prison pipeline for me because my behavioral interactions would have been misinterpreted (Dancy, 2014; Schott Foundation, 2012). I was an active boy. However, the typical kindergarten experiences that I just described are likely to be the experience of the 3-year old I met in the public library. His mother and he were in the children's section of the library sitting at a round table, which contained an ABC puzzle. The alphabet puzzle was designed so that children could identify wooden letters of the alphabet and placed them in the proper position within the puzzle. As his mother handed each letter of the alphabet to him, he loudly called out each letter and placed them in their rightful position on the puzzle. "A, B, C..." and so forth and so on, said Jason, as he laid down each wooden letter. This incident also serves as a counter-narrative because the dominant narrative suggests that Black mothers and fathers are not involved in the educational lives of their children (Boutte & Johnson, 2013).

I was so intrigued with Jason's ability to identify the letters of the alphabet and place them in their correct positions on the puzzle. A few minutes later, I left my seat to tell his mother how proud of him I was and how brilliant he seems to be. She smiled and thanked me for my kind gesture. However, on my way back to my chair, I began to think about Jason's brilliance for soon he would likely enter the public school system since most children of color are public-school dependent (Milner, 2015). That is, they depend on the public school system to provide them an education (Milner, 2015). At that moment I also recalled a statement shared by Mrs. Boin during a focus group discussion. She insisted that she was afraid that someone would try "to dim" Roland's light because he was smart. I also developed similar fear for Jason because he, too, demonstrated strong academic prowess. I was afraid that someone would dim his light, particularly White teachers who enter classrooms with unchecked biases and stereotypes regarding Black children including Black boys (Boutte, 2015; Matias, 2013). I clearly understand why the Black parents in the present study feared White teachers' negative interactional styles with their Black sons. I agree with Douglass (1886) who argued, "Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons, nor property will be safe. (p. 35)" It is clear that Black boys are not safe in schools (Howard, 2014; Kunjufu, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2011).

However, based on the results of this study, Black men teachers who are culturally relevant and fictive kin can change the reality of school and schooling for Black males, like Jason, in early childhood education and schools. Culturally relevant Black men teachers can help shape the academic success, cultural competence, and



sociopolitical awareness of their Black male students by acknowledging their cultural capital and using it to influence curricular opportunities (Brown, 2012; Lynn, 2006). They can provide the safety Black family members seek in relations for their sons. Despite these academic and social contributions to the lives of Black males and other students, Black male teachers, like teachers of color in general, cannot change the institutional barriers including race, racism, and classism that negatively influence the schooling experiences of Black male students (Sleeter & Milner, 2011). Educational scholars, researchers, policy-makers must continue to examine and explore the potential of Black men teachers who use culturally relevant pedagogy in early childhood education classrooms. Educators need more studies like the present one. This will help in identifying those Black men teachers who are truly positively influencing the academic outcomes of Black male students, particularly those in early childhood education.

After much reflection on the Black male kindergartners in this study, I have to shift my gaze to the Black male kindergarten teachers who serve them. As a participant-observer, I came to understand the complexities and challenges of being a Black male kindergarten teachers. While all of my Black male teacher participants have proven academic results in kindergarten classroom, specifically among Black male kindergarteners, most of them did not want to become kindergarten teachers. Mr. Javien, who has a degree in early childhood education, was never interested in teaching kindergarten. He took his kindergarten position out of obligation. In other words, he needed a job. He was previously offered kindergarten positions, which he decided not to pursue. Mr. Javien has future plans to become a school administrator. Mr. Henry always wanted to be a kindergarten teacher, but does not desire to remain in such position. Like

Mr. Javien, he desires to pursue a career in school administration. Mr. Tal was also assigned to teach kindergarten in light of former success in upper elementary grades. Therefore, he did not choose the kindergarten classroom but is thriving therein. He also desires to pursue a career in school administration. He is currently taking classes toward a Master's degree in school administration. In other words, some of the Black male teachers did not want to be kindergarten teachers. Most of them had stereotypes about the kindergarten classroom before they entered (i.e., "whining children," and too much responsibilities") and most teacher education programs did not provide them opportunities to do their internships in kindergarten classrooms in order to unlearn those stereotypes. Mr. Javien and Mr. Tal admitted that they grew to love working in kindergarten classrooms. However, based on my interviews with these teachers and class observations, such idea was clear.

I also learned about the challenges associated with being a Black male kindergarten teacher in both predominantly Black and White schools. Mr. Javien spoke about his constrained relationship with his Black female administrator who desired him to follow a curriculum that did not meet the needs of his students. Likewise, Mr. Tal had similar challenges. His White female principal wanted him to use pedagogical strategies that were not culturally responsive for his students. Mr. Henry's challenges were somewhat different. He had to constantly explain to his White parents that he does not teach and engage children in the same ways White women teachers do. Therefore, pursuing a career in school administration seemingly is the most logical idea for Black men who desire to avoid the politics of the early childhood classroom. However, I believe through support and effort, educators can recruit and retain culturally relevant

Black men teachers to early childhood classrooms. In the next section, I provide implications for policy and practice to help educators think about ways to support culturally relevant Black men teachers, male students, and family members.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

From Black male kindergarten teachers to the Black family members whose Black male sons are under their tutelage, many of the research participants in this study spoke to the benefits of having culturally relevant Black men teachers work in early childhood education level. That is, Black men teachers who are able to develop academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical awareness were perceived to meet the academic and social needs of Black male students. However, the majority of those who spoke in this study are not always given an opportunity to sit at the table to decide what is best for Black children, especially Black males (Howard, 2014). Critical race theory helps us understand that the voices of Black people have been historically rendered silent or marginalized in a White Supremacist society, and such silence is maintained in societal institutions including K-12 schools. Black teachers, children, and family members rarely have opportunities to express their opinions and provide their perceptions regarding schools in general and teachers specifically. As I provide implications and recommendations, it is my goal to address public policies, national Black male teacher recruitment, teacher education programs, and school administrators to aid in sustaining a populous of culturally relevant Black male kindergarten teachers who are able to produce achievement outcomes among Black boys.

## **Implications for Public Policy**

Over the past few decades, there has been an intentional focus on the recruitment of Black men teachers (Jones & Jenkins, 2012). Black men teacher recruitment programs including *Call Me Mister* has been responsible for the recruitment of some Black men to the classroom. However, little effort has been made to retain Black men teachers to classroom from a policy perspective. This is particularly true for Black men who are culturally relevant and are able to support the academic needs of Black and Brown children in K-12 classrooms. Therefore, there is a need for policies, which specifically address ways to retain culturally relevant Black men teachers to K-12 classrooms.

Moreover, while a national effort including President Obama's *My Brother's Keeper* initiative has been made to support Black and other males of color in schools and society, these programs often lack a sociopolitical component, which has potential to help Black and other males understand structural inequities that negatively influence their lives in schools and society (Dumas, 2016; Noguera 2014, 2015). Instead, most of these programs blame Black males for their own social ills (Dumas, 2016; Noguera 2014, 2015). Thus, while initiatives like My Brother's Keeper are well-intentioned programs, they need to become more culturally relevant to support Black and other males of color.

## **Implications for Black Male Teacher Recruitment Programs**

While there is a need for more Black male teachers in PK-12 classrooms, the results of this study imply that there is a demonstrated need for Black male teachers in early childhood education. In fact, Black male students validated the importance of having Black male teachers in early childhood education, based on how they perceived them. They were able to connect with their teachers on personal levels while also

developing academic skills including motivation and interest essential to continued progress in public K-12 schools. Therefore, Black male teacher recruitment should develop an intentional campaign to seek Black male teachers to support Black male students in early childhood education, specifically kindergarten. However, I agree with Bristol (2015) who argues that the recruitment and retention efforts should not be targeted towards any Black male teachers. However, there should be an intentional pursuit of Black men teachers who are culturally relevant in their identities and pedagogical practices. This focus should be intentional at the early childhood level, as most Black and other children of color who are school dependent experience school for the first time. Not many culturally relevant Black males are encouraged to become teachers, and even fewer are encouraged to become teachers of young children due to gender norms and expectations for men, particularly Black men (Bryan & Browder, 2013). Having more culturally relevant Black men teachers at the early childhood level broaden the understanding of Black boys regarding who can become teachers. In order to accomplish such goal, Black male teacher recruitment efforts including *Call Me Mister* should be intentional in preparing Black male teachers to become culturally relevant. That is, these programs should integrate sessions where they can help prospective Black male teachers deepen their understanding of structural inequities that negatively influence the schooling experiences of Black children so they can develop hearts of culturally relevant pedagogue to support Black and Brown children in schools.

### **Implications for Colleges and Schools of Education Programs**

Considering that Black male kindergarten students in this study benefited from culturally relevant Black male teachers in kindergarten classrooms, prospective and

practicing Black male teachers, administrators, school counselors and other educational stakeholders could benefit from engaging in educational coursework that supports their understanding of and development in culturally relevant pedagogy. Therefore, Colleges and Schools of Education need to infuse culturally relevant teaching into their education coursework. This has been a long-standing recommendation in educational research (Boutte, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009). However, with more than two decades of research on culturally relevant teaching, few Colleges and Schools of Education programs have moved in the direction to infuse such ideas in their curricula. It is important that school administrators embrace culturally relevant pedagogy to better support teachers in their culturally relevant identities and development. Many teachers experience pushback from school administrators as they attempt to engage in culturally relevant practices in K-12 schools (Milner, 2010). Thus, in order to reverse these trends, courses in educational leadership/administration should help aspiring school leaders to come to such understandings in administrative coursework. School counselors can also benefit from culturally relevant school counseling practices to support Black males in PK-12 schools (Henfield & McGee, 2012). Based on the results of this study, specific preparation in using hip-hop, sports, and critical literacies as instructional tools is essential to the academic preparation and engagement of Black male students in early childhood education, as Black males seemingly benefit academically from these approaches in early childhood classrooms. In some schools, teachers are embracing these practices to improve the academic performance outcomes of Black boys (see Hill, 2009; Emdin, 2016). Moreover, school counselors are also using hip-hop to provide counseling to Black male students (Washington, 2015).

Colleges and Schools of Education should explicitly address issues of equity and diversity in its curriculum as a way to help White and Black teachers develop dispositions that support Black males in schools. A large body of research suggests that schools are sites of Black male suffering (Dancy, 2014; Hopkins, 1997; Howard, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2011). This needs to change. School administrators, counselors, and teachers must learn to listen, hear, and understand Black male students in K-12 schools. They want to express how they feel about teachers and the schooling process in general. Black male students can be provided opportunities to become a part of school and community groups such as School Improvement Council to elicit their voices about schools and teachers. They can also be provided opportunities to serve on hiring panels to select teachers who will serve then in K-12 schools. Moreover, the Black parents in this study were very concerned about White teachers' and other educational professionals' interactional styles with Black boys in schools and saw Black men teachers as those who could protect Black males from such racial microaggressions. Considering that schools are considered safe havens for 'all children,' this is major concern that should be given much attention in teacher education programs.

Moreover, Colleges and Schools of Education programs and in-service teaching professional development for Black male teachers may benefit from reflecting on wisdom that teachers learn from Black families that can be extrapolated to K-12 classrooms.

### **Implications for Early Childhood and Other School Administrators**

This study implies that K-12 educational administrators should provide teachers opportunities to develop pedagogical skills to support Black male students, particularly those who are in early education classrooms. Although many theories and research

studies including culturally relevant pedagogy are introduced and shared in pre-service teacher education programs, these conceptions rarely find their way in K-12 schools (Long et al., 2006). If they do it is only for brief periods and they are often canceled out by more normative, oppressive practices in schools (Long et al., 2006). Most of these ‘conventional’ pedagogical practices have proven themselves damaging to the schooling experiences of Black males and other children of color (Boutte, 2015; King, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

The voices of Black family members have been consistently marginalized in public K-12 schools (Boutte & Johnson, 2014; Johnson, 2015). However, Black family members in this study had opportunities to share the characteristics they felt important in kindergarten teachers. They were adamant about the characteristics and qualities kindergarten teachers should possess to effectively work with their Black male students. School administrators should work collaboratively with Black families to determine, identify, and hire Black male teachers who would be effective in working with their Black sons, based on characteristics and qualities they ascribe. Moreover, Black family members should also be given opportunities to voice their opinions relative to school-related matters. Most schools already have school improvement councils and other community advisory boards in place (Boutte, 2015; Boutte & Johnson, 2014). Therefore, there needs to be intentional recruitment and retention of Black family members to these school-related entities. Like the insight they provided in this study about their Black sons’ teachers, similar insight could be sought in other school-related matters. This would serve to counter ways that Black and other family members from culturally and linguistically diverse are discouraged from participating in K-12 schools.



## **Future Research**

Over this course of this project, I have learned and come to understand a lot about the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers as described by Black male kindergarten teachers, male students, and family members. However, in actuality, I only see this work as the beginning of additional research that is needed on this topic. Briefly I propose recommendations for research considerations, which also highlights some of the limitations to this study.

### **Research Recommendations**

A large body of educational research on Black male teachers have aided in the essentialist construction of Black male teachers as social change agents (i.e., father figures, coaches, and disciplinarian). Therefore, there are few studies, including this one, that move beyond these constructed roles from non-deficit perspectives. To that end, educational researchers should continue to engage in studies that move beyond the essentialist constructions of the Black male teacher by enabling Black male teachers to name their own realities as role models for Black and other children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. In other words, more research studies are needed to clarify how Black male teachers perceive themselves as role models (or not). Similarly, scholars should determine how Black male teachers are using essentialist terminology to describe their roles in classrooms.

Because I want like to know what other scholars learn about Black male kindergarten teachers and culturally relevant ones specifically, I want scholars to conduct more qualitative and quantitative research studies on a larger number of culturally relevant Black male teachers. Although scholars have conducted qualitative studies on

culturally relevant Black male teachers, few scholars have explored Black male kindergarten teachers. Surveying a larger number of culturally relevant Black male kindergarten teachers adds to the knowledge base and complexity of what is known about Black male teachers in general.

In light of the interest Black male kindergartners in this study had in hip-hop, sports, literacy and mathematics, more studies are needed to explore ways they use these instructional practices to facilitate their learning in early childhood classrooms. Scholars may be able to find other counter-hegemonic ways Black male students engage in literacy and mathematics. Similarly, studies are needed to explore ways Black male teachers encourage the use of hip-hop and sports to support teaching and learning in early childhood classroom.

To reiterate, one of the limitations found in Chapter 4 of this study is that it was conducted over the course of nine months. However, I recommend that scholars spend longer periods of time observing culturally relevant Black male teacher with more than one cohort of students. This is an important idea if educators are going to better understand the pedagogical benefits and contributions of Black male teachers collectively, but also male teachers in early childhood specifically. This idea is important to the academic success of Black students in general, but also Black male students specifically.

Further, while this study explored how the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers influenced Black male students, subsequent research should explore the ways Black male kindergarten teachers influence the academic success of White students and other students of color including Black girls. There is a

growing body of literature that underscores the challenges Black girls face in public pre-K- schools (Winn, 2010).

Finally, scholars who conduct research on Black male teachers should continue to explore multidimensional frameworks to do so. Black men teachers who enter the teaching profession come from diverse backgrounds (Brockenbrough, 2008; 2012, a, b). Thus, to better understand Black men teachers, scholars should explore the diversity that exists among them and how such diversity influence their identities, ability to support Black male students, and pedagogical styles.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

It is clear that there is a need to recruit and retain culturally relevant Black male teachers to early childhood classrooms as a response to the growing call to recruit and retain Black male teachers in general to K-12 classrooms. Considering that kindergarten is foundational to the schooling process of all children, having culturally relevant Black male teachers can serve to benefit White, Black and other children of color. Particularly, valuable are those Black male teachers who value the use of hip-hop, sports as mathematic literacies for most Black male students whose global identities are informed by these conceptions. However, even as the Black male teachers in this study employed these strategies, their unique identities and pedagogical styles must be considered to fully understand the contributions of Black male teachers, culturally relevant or not, to K-12 classrooms. Thus, exploring Black male teachers, even those who are culturally relevant, from multidimensional frameworks are important to the increased understanding of Black male teachers in general. While the identities and pedagogical styles of most Black male teachers are seemingly important to Black male students (Brown, 2009), they are

important to most Black family members who see Black male teachers as providing safe spaces in kindergarten classrooms from the racially microaggressive spaces, which dominant most kindergarten classrooms. Therefore, educators must continue to move “Toward a Multidimensional Framework: Exploring the Constructed Identities and Pedagogical Styles of Black male kindergarten Teachers in the South.”

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**APPENDIX A:**  
**TEACHER CONSENT FORM**

August 12, 2014

Dear Teacher,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am Nathaniel Bryan, faculty member at the University of South Carolina. I am currently conducting a research study on the constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers who produce high achievement outcomes among Black male students. This is an important study as to help us understand how Black male kindergarten teachers impact the Black male students they serve both academically and socially. Perspectives from Black male kindergarten teachers are needed to help make this study a successful one.

With such considerations in mind, I would like to invite you to be a part of this study to determine the identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teacher. If you agree to participate in this study, I will conduct an initial interview with you at your earliest convenience.

Please be aware taking part in this study is your decision. You do not have to do so if you choose not to. You may also decide at anytime to not participate. Participation or non-participation will not affect you in anyway.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me at [bryann@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:bryann@mailbox.sc.edu) or 803-261-9381/803-777-5295 or Dr. Gloria Boutte at [gsboutte@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:gsboutte@mailbox.sc.edu) or 803-777-2018. If you have any questions about your child's

rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at the University of South Carolina as (803) 777-7095.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. If you decide to participate, please sign the attached form and return it to me.

Educationally yours,

Nathaniel Bryan

#### **Teacher Consent/Assent Form**

**Study Title: Toward A Multidimensional Framework: Exploring the Constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers in the South**

**Researcher:** Nathaniel Bryan

I have read the information contained in the letter about the above titled study, which describes what I will be asked to do if I decide to participate, and that I can stop participating at anytime I choose.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I want to participate in the study.

-OR-

\_\_\_\_\_ No, I do not want to participate in the study at this time.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX B:**  
**STUDENT ASSENT/CONSENT FORM**

April 12, 2015

Dear Parent,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am Nathaniel Bryan, faculty member at the University of South Carolina. I am currently conducting a research study on the constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers who produce high achievement outcomes among Black male students. This is an important study as to help us understand how Black male kindergarten teachers impact the Black male students they serve both academically and socially. Perspectives from parents and children are needed to help make this study a successful one.

With such considerations in mind, I would like to conduct an interview with your child, \_\_\_\_\_, to determine how the identities and pedagogical styles of his kindergarten teacher impact him in the classroom. If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study, I will conduct one interview with him/her during the month of April or May 2015.

Please be aware that allowing your child to take part in this study is your decision. You do not have to allow him to do so if you choose not to. You may also decide at anytime to not allow your child to participate. Participation or non-participation will not affect your child in anyway.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me at [bryann@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:bryann@mailbox.sc.edu) or 803-261-9381/803-777-5295 or Dr. Gloria Boutte at [gsboutte@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:gsboutte@mailbox.sc.edu) or 803-777-2018. If you have any questions about your child's rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at the University of South Carolina as (803) 777-7095.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. If you decide to allow your child to participate, please sign the attached form and return it to your child's teacher.

Educationally yours,

Nathaniel Bryan

### **Child Consent/Assent Form**

**Study Title: Toward A Multidimensional Framework: Exploring the Constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers in the South**

**Researcher:** Nathaniel Bryan

I have read the information contained in the letter about the above titled study, which describes what my child will be asked to do if I decide to allow him to participate, and that he can stop participating at anytime he chooses.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I give my child permission to participate in the study.

-OR-

\_\_\_\_\_ No, I do not want my child to participate in the study at this time.

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parants/Guardian's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**APPENDIX C:**  
**PARENT CONSENT FORM**

April 12, 2015

Dear Parent,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am Nathaniel Bryan, faculty member at the University of South Carolina. I am currently conducting a research study on the constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers who produce high achievement outcomes among Black male students. This is an important study as to help us understand how Black male kindergarten teachers impact the Black male students they serve both academically and socially. Perspectives from parents and children are needed to help make this study a successful one.

With such considerations in mind, I would like you to be a part of a focus group with other parents to determine how the identities and pedagogical styles of your child's kindergarten teacher impact him/her in the classroom. If you agree to participate in this study, I will invite you to participate in a focus group during the month of April or May 2015.

Please be aware that participating in this study is your decision. You do not have to do so if you choose not to. You may also decide at anytime to withdraw from the study. Your participation or non-participation will not affect you in anyway.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me at [bryann@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:bryann@mailbox.sc.edu) or 803-261-9381/803-777-5295 or Dr. Gloria Boutte at [gsboutte@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:gsboutte@mailbox.sc.edu) or 803-777-2018. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at the University of South Carolina as (803) 777-7095.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. If you decide to participate, please sign the attached form and return it to your child's teacher.

Educationally yours,

Nathaniel Bryan

#### Parent Consent/Assent Form

**Study Title: Toward A Multidimensional Framework: Exploring the Constructed identities and pedagogical styles of Black male kindergarten teachers in the South**

**Researcher:** Nathaniel Bryan

I have read the information contained in the letter about the above titled study, which describes what I will be asked to do if I decide to participate, and that I can stop participating at anytime I choose.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I would like to participate in the study.

-OR-

\_\_\_\_\_ No, I do not want to participate in the study at this time.

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone/Cellphone: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX D:**

### **SAMPLE OF PRE-INTERVIEW TEACHER QUESTIONS**

#### **Domain I: Conceptions of Self and Others**

1. What do you define as the community?
2. How do you see yourself in relation to the community?
3. What do you see as the relationship between teaching and the community in which you teach? Do you have any examples of your own that you would like to share?
4. What are your beliefs regarding students' roles and participation in the community?
5. What are your beliefs about student academic success?
6. What do you see as the role of teachers in helping students make connections between their community, national and global identities? How?

#### **Domain II: Social Relations in the Classroom**

7. What are your beliefs regarding teacher-student relationships?
8. What are your beliefs about teachers making connections with all students?
9. What are your beliefs regarding student collaboration with each other?

#### **Domain III: Conceptions of Knowledge**

10. How do you think students construct knowledge?
11. What is the role of passion in teaching?

12. How do you define student excellence? student diversity and individual differences?

13. In what ways can teachers help students develop necessary academic and social skills? Explain.

#### Domain IV: Critiquing the System

13. What is your belief regarding the existence of racism, sexism, and classism in society?

#### Other Questions:

14. What do you believe about the achievement of Black boys?

15. What role do you see yourself playing in helping Black boys succeed in both schools and communities?

**APPENDIX E:**  
**SAMPLE TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How do you describe yourself as a teacher?
2. What/Who inspired you to become a teacher?
3. Why did you choose early childhood education?
4. What do you think about teaching kindergarten?
5. What is your perception of Black male teachers as role models, coaches, and father figures?
6. What teaching styles/strategies are effective with young Black males in kindergarten classrooms? How do you know?
7. What role, if any, does race and gender play in the teaching practices you use as a Black male kindergarten teacher?
8. I noticed that you did \_\_\_\_\_ in the classroom. Can you tell me about that?
9. What are your thoughts about Black male students' academic achievement?
10. Could you explain \_\_\_\_\_ in your lesson plan?
11. Please explain why do you send \_\_\_\_\_ to parents.

**APPENDIX F:**  
**STUDENT FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. You have seen me in your classroom on several occasions and I would like to ask you a few questions to find out what you think.

1. What's your name?
2. How old are you?
3. What is your favorite color?
4. Who do you like playing with at school? Why?
5. What do you like about school? What do you think about school? What are some of your favorite subjects? Least favorite?
6. What do you think about your teacher, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_? Describe Mr. \_\_\_\_.  
What do you like about him?
7. What kinds of things does he do to help you learn?
8. What have Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ taught you? Can you think of something that he taught you?

**APPENDIX G:**  
**SAMPLE PARENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What do you think about Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ as your child's teacher?
2. What do you think about your child having a Black male as a kindergarten teacher?
3. Could you speak about your initial reaction when you discovered that your son had a Black male kindergarten teacher?
4. What are your perspectives regarding men in early childhood education?
5. What are essential skills Black male students need to be successful in schools?
6. In what ways do you think that Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ provide those skills?
7. How has your son been academically and socially impacted by Mr. \_\_\_\_\_?
8. What do you like about Mr. \_\_\_\_\_'s teaching?
9. Are there areas that you think he could improve?
10. What could Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ do differently in his classroom to better support your son?
11. What are the identities and characteristics of an ideal kindergarten teacher?
12. Do you see Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ as a part of the community? In what ways is Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ a part of the community?
13. Do you see Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ giving back to the community? In what ways does Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ give back to the community?
14. In what ways does Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ demonstrates connection and/or relate to your son?

**APPENDIX H:**

**BLACK MALE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA**

<b>NAME</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Winter MAP GOALS</b>	<b>Winter MAP Scores</b>	<b>SPRING MAP GOALS</b>	<b>SPRING MAP SCORES</b>	<b>+/-</b>
Melvin	Javien	140	167	145	176	+9
Zachariah	Javien	140	157	145	155	-2
Brandon	Javien	140	146	145	148	+2
Breon	Javien	140	149	145	155	+6
Demarcus*	Javien	140	138	145	148	+10
Joseph	Javien	140	162	145	168	+6
Marquavious*	Javien	140	142	145	162	+20
Ameer*	Javien	140	180	145	180	0
Keith	Javien	140	151	145	167	+16
Mansa	Javien	140	145	145	141	-4
Roland*	Henry	155	180	160	181	+1
Corey	Henry	155	150	160	155	+5
Dillon*	Henry	155	167	160	165	-2
Mario*	Henry	155	172	160	180	+8
Xavier	Henry	155	150	160	160	+10
Joshua*	Henry	155	170	160	170	0
Braden*	Tal	145	145	150	162	+17
Deon	Tal	145	142	150	147	+5
Kelvin	Tal	145	146	150	162	+16
Maurice*	Tal	145	141	150	141	0
Anthony	Tal	145	150	150	151	+1
Montrell*	Tal	145	151	150	159	+8
Keon	Tal	145	141	150	153	+12
Cameron*	Tal	145	143	150	152	+9
Vance	Tal	145	142	150	161	+19
Dominick	Tal	145	129	150	128	-1
Zion*	Tal	145	167	150	167	0
Gilbert	Tal	145	164	150	166	+2